



FAST COMPANY

999 reasons
BUZZFEED is No. 1

—
OMG?! **NETFLIX**
beats **AMAZON!**

—
Can you guess where
APPLE ranks?

—
Crazy numbers at **UBER**,
SNAPCHAT, **SOULCYCLE**

—
Yes, **TACO BELL!**
(Sorry, Chipotle)

Why **FACEBOOK**
scares everyone

—
Goodbye **GOOGLE**,
Hello **ALPHABET**

—
What the heck is
RIOT GAMES?

—
Badass obsessions:
AIRBNB, **FARFETCH**, **HUDL**

—
Can **SLACK** make you
love work?

THE WORLD'S 50 MOST INNOVATIVE COMPANIES

What This Guy
Knows Will Blow
Your Mind
BuzzFeed CEO
Jonah Peretti



As a naval aviator, test pilot and astronaut, Mark Kelly has been recognized for his courage and determination. A true pioneer, he appreciates the innovation, craftsmanship and utility of the Exospace B55, the first Breitling connected chronograph. This multifunction electronic instrument, powered by an exclusive COSC chronometer-certified caliber, reinvents the connected watch by dedicating it to the service of aviation professionals. Performance, functionality, and reliability. Welcome to the world of tomorrow's technology. Welcome to our world.

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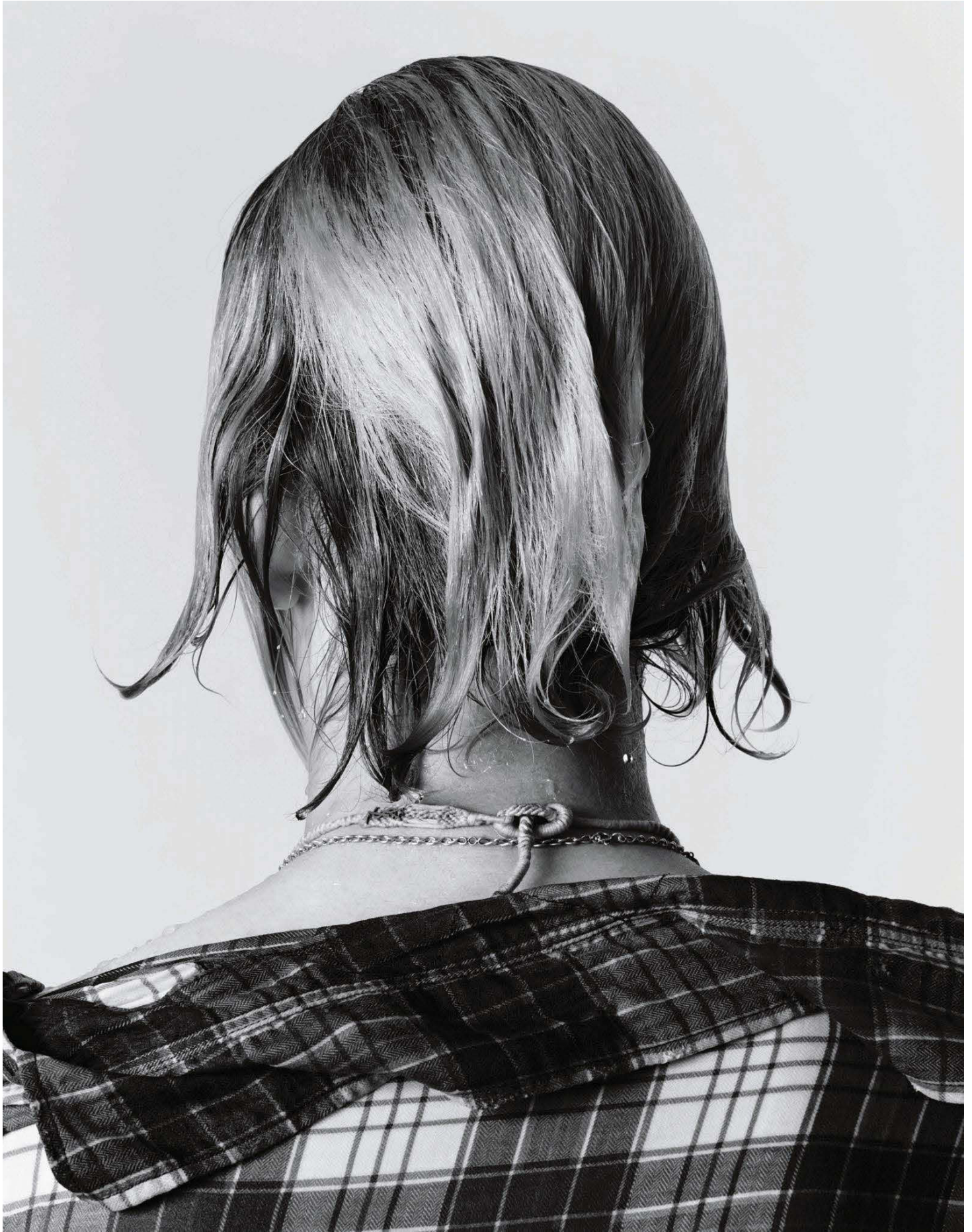


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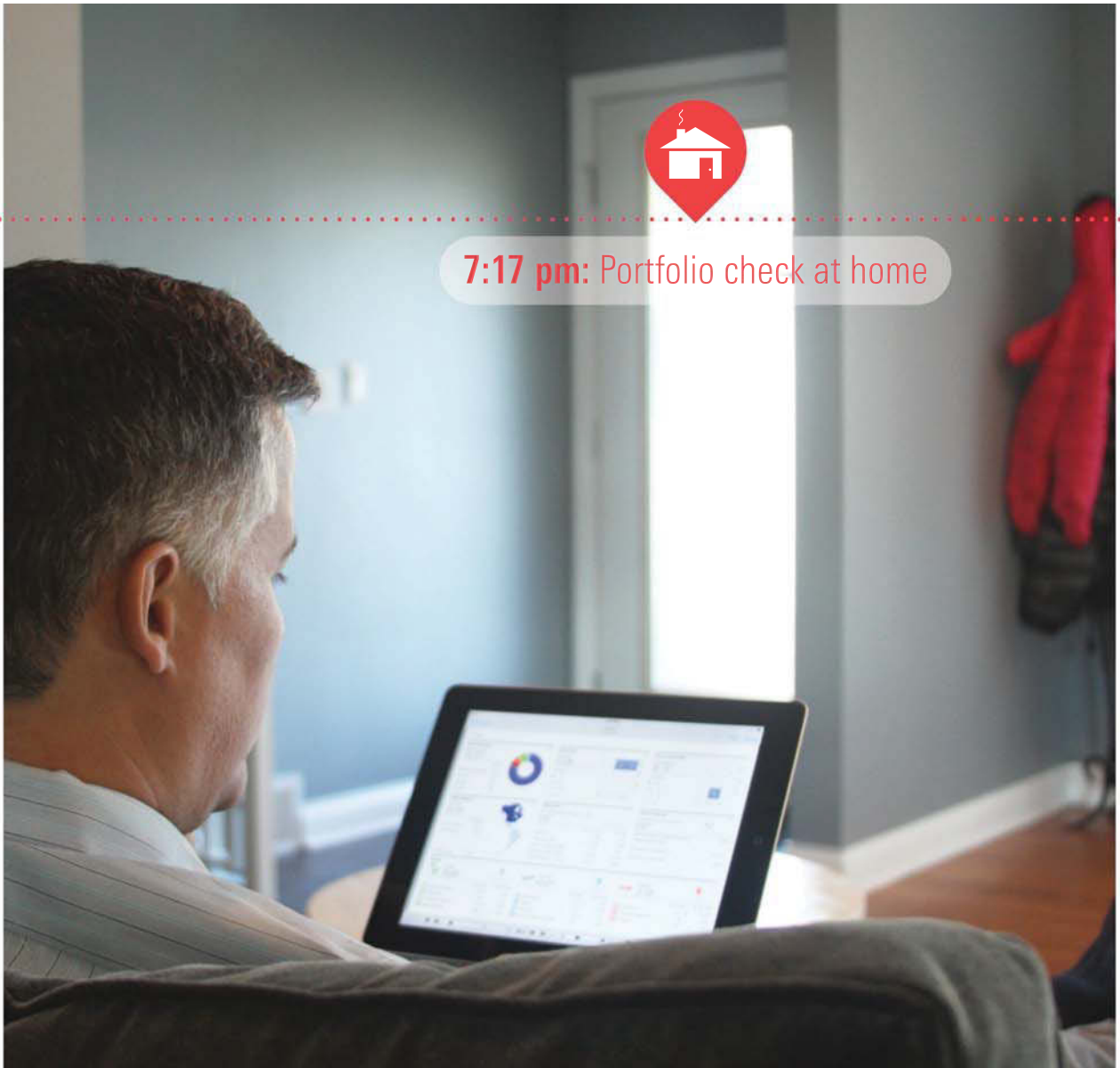
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7:17 pm: Portfolio check at home

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MORNINGSTAR®

The World's 50 Most Innovative Companies

Our annual guide
to the businesses that
matter the most.

Begins on page 28

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virtual reality.

What color is this face?

"With BuzzFeed, I
always felt like, let's
have as big an impact
as we can. Let's grow
this into something
giant," says CEO Jonah
Peretti. (See page 30.)

On the cover
and this page:
Photographs by
Eric Ogden

Ripe for reconstruction

Relentlessly rethinking its menu is in Taco Bell's DNA. (See page 46.)

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IN A GROWING COMPANY, YOU WORK 9-5 AND 5-9.

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Chris Hemsworth works hard and chooses his roles carefully. He handles pressure by taming it, and turning it to his advantage. #DontCrackUnderPressure was coined with him in mind.



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15 lessons of innovation for 2016

When we set out to build this year's list of the World's Most Innovative Companies, we didn't begin with macroeconomic parameters. Instead our reporting team dug into details on thousands of companies around the globe. Our axiom has always been that whatever challenges may be buffeting business—political uncertainty, market instability, international unrest—there are always pockets of extraordinary achievement. That is what we were looking to uncover.

And we were inspired by what we found. Our top 50 companies (beginning on page 28) includes only six repeats from a year ago, underscoring the dynamism of the innovation landscape. Our top 10 lists (page 106) spotlight leaders in more than 20 different sectors, from architecture to virtual reality, China to India. We partnered for the first time with data-analysis outfit Quid, whose machine-intelligence engine helped us identify a broader pool of candidates; that breadth reinforced our conviction that a new wave of business practices is increasingly taking hold across the world.

Many lessons are embedded in the stories of success within our Most Innovative Companies package; I've pulled out 15 here. One overarching conclusion: Global innovation is more robust than ever.



Robert Safian
editor@fastcompany.com



1 ORGANIZATIONS CAN LEARN.

The top two companies on this year's list, BuzzFeed (No. 1) and Facebook (No. 2), have thrived by embracing constant evolution in their products and in their processes. BuzzFeed's video teams are reorganized every three months; the native ad programs it creates for marketers evolve through iterative testing; and new data metrics like viral lift are developed, scrutinized, and tweaked. All that motion can seem messy, but it breeds a culture of curiosity and learning, and, as CEOs Jonah Peretti and Mark Zuckerberg clearly demonstrate, culture is strategy.

2 AMAPPOOGLEBOOK LEADS THE WAY.

The four titans of tech continue to set the standard for relentless progress and ambition within the last year. Amazon (No. 6) has deepened its dominance of e-commerce and web services while pressing into entertainment and electronics—and making Amazon Prime the must-have membership of the modern age. Apple (No. 7) launched a new watch, a new music service, new phones, new tablets, new stores—it's a breathless pace. Google's reorientation as Alphabet (No. 8) underscores its ambition to do more than just

"organize all the world's information," as it moves beyond its dominance in media to target eradicating disease, self-driving cars, and so forth. Along with Facebook, the three As are determined to be disrupters, and they collectively push everyone else—and one another—to adopt an ever-faster metabolism.

3 TECH HAS NO MONOPOLY ON SPEED.

Fast food has never been faster than at today's Taco Bell (No. 10). CEO Brian Niccol encourages his team to, as he puts it, "break a little glass." The Tex-Mex chain rolls out a new menu item every five weeks; the longevity of those products depends on their market success, a mirror of the test-and-iterate approach that drives Silicon Valley. Niccol wants to be at the forefront of everything, from ordering to delivery. All the activity has energized the company internally and made the brand more relevant to its target youth customers.

4 STREAMING CAN'T BE STOPPED.

Despite the financial limitations for music labels and artists (and holdouts like Taylor Swift and Adele), music consumers have shown their preference for Spotify (No. 19) and its kin. The next frontier—video—is crumbling as well. When

Netflix (No. 5) opened its service in more than 130 countries in one day, it was simply reflecting an unstoppable train that runs from YouTube to *The Man in the High Castle*. When BuzzFeed delivers 2.5 billion video views a month and Facebook's monthly video views jump from 1 billion to 8 billion in just over a year, the predilection for on-demand access is undeniable.

5 THE MOBILE GAME IS JUST BEGINNING.

Those devices in our pockets aren't just a challenge to traditional media. Nor is their impact restricted to booming platforms like Uber (No. 4), Airbnb (No. 31), and Snapchat (No. 38). New services, buoyed by rising design proficiency on mobile, are spawning entirely new markets. Robinhood (No. 11) has knifed into the investing world; Hudl (No. 35) is bringing its insights to more than 100,000 sports teams; Shyp (No. 46) will pick up and pack anything for you, at the push of a button.

6 OLD COMPANIES CAN BE REMADE.

Hasbro (No. 50) was launched almost a century ago in Providence, Rhode Island, yet that legacy hasn't prevented it from unlocking new customers around the



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The new playbook

Mobile video company Hudl is helping both professional teams and high schools like Georgia's Jonesboro Cardinals (in white) to step up their play with its game-film software and apps. (See page 78.)



world. GE (No. 20) has embraced its 100-plus-year-old heritage of invention to find modern relevance. Even Vail Resorts (No. 44) has tapped new kinds of data to energize what seemed like a settled ski business.

7 MARKETS ARE EVERYWHERE ...

When BuzzFeed went global, it was merely following the flow of its content. Universal (No. 12) reached \$5 billion at the box office at a record pace, thanks to international audiences, and Farfetch (No. 23) unlocks a cross-border clientele for more than 300 fashion boutiques.

8 ... BUT LOCATION DOESN'T MATTER.

Noora Health (No. 45) was started at Stanford, has its design and engineering team in San Francisco, and its CEO splits her time between Boston and Bangalore, India. Cyanogen (No. 14) is based in California, but its consumer base is in Asia. The India-based mobile ad player InMobi (No. 15) dominates in China as well as at home.

9 PARTNERSHIPS HAVE POWER.

Taco Bell found its new mojo after its wildly successful launch of Doritos Locos Tacos. BuzzFeed

supercharged its reach when it embraced 30-plus outside platforms to distribute its content.

10 COMMUNITIES HAVE IMPACT.

Social media has made it easier than ever to express our individuality, fostering new communities like Black Lives Matter (No. 9), which, without a budget or advertising, has generated significant, tangible impact. In today's world, the very concept of an enterprise is being redefined.

11 BRAVERY IS REQUIRED.

CVS Health (No. 3) chose to forgo \$2 billion in revenue

from tobacco sales—a bold step given Wall Street's increasingly activist tendencies—in quest of a longer-term vision: improving the health of its customers, not simply selling them products.

12 MISSION DRIVES CHANGE.

Sama Group (No. 39) is rethinking how not-for-profits are funded, while venture firm Social Capital (No. 34) is reimagining how funding should be deployed. John Oliver's HBO show, produced by Sixteen String Jack (No. 29), has distinguished itself by attacking serious issues with humor.

13 THE DOCTOR IS ALL IN.

Medical treatments are evolving as fast as communication technology; it's just harder to see it. In the cancer arena alone, Novocure (No. 16) is deploying electricity, Amgen (No. 18) is unleashing viruses, and Bristol-Myers Squibb (No. 17) is enlisting a person's own T cells to attack tumors and save lives.

14 HYPE FADES, AND FADS MATURE.

The buzz for wearable technology has abated, but Fitbit (No. 37) continues to broaden its user base. Drones (see page 107) are not just toys and are finding new applications across industries. What was niche is becoming mainstream, as Jaunt (No. 49) is discovering with virtual reality and as Riot Games (No. 22) has precipitated with e-sports.

15 THERE'S A NEW WORLD OUT THERE.

If you connect all these new companies and changes—from Slack (No. 26) in the work world to Airbnb in travel, from Robinhood to BuzzFeed to Hudl, from Black Lives Matter to Riot Games to Uber—what emerges is a landscape very different from the one we grew up in. Self-driving cars. DNA-targeted treatments. The advances are inexorable, exciting, mind-blowing. Those who embrace these transitions (even at unlikely companies like Taco Bell) will have the tools to influence them. What could be more powerful than that? **FC**



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In tune

Pandora's agreement with Sony/ATV includes Adele (pictured) and many other artists.

A sound new strategy?

PANDORA

Pandora is changing its tune. As more and more music fans sign up for on-demand streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music, the Internet radio giant has lost some momentum, but now the company is transforming itself via a slew of recent deals and acquisitions.

In July, Pandora bought music-data-analytics startup Next Big Sound, giving the company deep insight into how people listen to songs online. Then last fall, it acquired concert-ticket site Ticketfly, which it's now integrating into its core service, and signed a licensing deal with Sony/ATV, settling a long-running dispute that threatened the company's access to songs from big

stars such as Adele and Taylor Swift. And in December, it purchased on-demand streaming site Rdio, which will let it compete with Spotify and Apple Music. "We have been working toward building strong relationships with the industry and doing direct deals, which give us greater product flexibility and greater certainty about our future," says CEO Brian McAndrews. "The flip side of that is just execution."

Milestones Last fall, Pandora reached a \$90 million settlement with the RIAA, ending a lawsuit related to the use of recordings made before 1972.

Challenges While Pandora plans to launch an on-demand platform by the end of 2016, Spotify and Apple Music are quickly signing up millions of listeners.

Buzz ⇄

"We're trying to build the world's most powerful music-discovery platform."

Brian McAndrews
CEO, Pandora

FORD

Milestones The automaker announced plans to invest \$4.5 billion in electric-car research and will debut 13 electric cars by 2020. Ford will also triple its fleet of prototype self-driving cars over the next year.

Challenges The company voluntarily recalled nearly half a million vehicles for possible fuel-tank issues.

Buzz ↑

ALIBABA



Milestones The e-commerce giant recently purchased the *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's top English-language paper. It's also working on a new content-streaming service with Disney.

Challenges Alibaba's dominant Alipay platform is being targeted by Apple, which will bring Apple Pay to China.

Buzz ↑

UPS

Milestones As part of an effort to modernize its hubs, the company is planning a \$310 million expansion of its Louisville, Kentucky, shipping center, which will create more than 300 jobs and nearly double package-processing speed.

Challenges In October, UPS paid \$4 million to 14 states to settle a lawsuit alleging that it had falsified time stamps to avoid paying refunds for late deliveries. Earlier in 2015, UPS settled with New Jersey and the Department of Justice for \$25 million.

Buzz ⇄

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

"In five years we've become a global organization."

Jake Schwartz
CEO, General Assembly, in a blog post

Milestones The coding academy announced a new \$70 million Series D round last fall, bringing the start-up's total funding to nearly \$120 million.

Challenges The learn-to-code space is getting crowded. According to Course Report, the number of full-time programs grew by 103% between 2013 and 2015.

Buzz ↑

WME/IMG

Milestones The talent agency recently partnered with Turner Broadcasting to launch its own e-sports league. Turner's TBS network will air 20 live video-game competitions in 2016. WME/IMG also debuted fashion-focused Apple TV network M2M and bought the Miss Universe pageant from Donald Trump.

Challenges Just days after winning a Golden Globe for *American Horror Story*, Lady Gaga changed representation, leaving WME/IMG for rival agency CAA.

Buzz ↑



Alisdair McLellan (Adele), Jerome Favre/epa (newspaper); Reuters/Steve Marcus/Corbis (Miss Universe)

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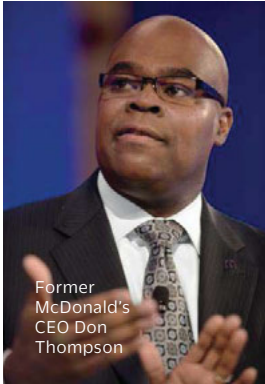
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BEYOND MEAT

Milestones In November, the plant-based-food producer announced that it was beefing up its board with the addition of former McDonald's president and CEO Don Thompson. The company, which is partly backed by Bill Gates, is now selling its vegan takes on chicken and beef in 10,000 stores, including Whole Foods and Target.

Challenges Some tasters have been less enthusiastic about the company's "burger" patties than previous products such as faux-chicken strips.

Buzz ⬆

UNIVERSAL IDENTIFICATION AUTHORITY OF INDIA (UIDAI)

Milestones In November, the agency announced that 74% of India's 1.2 billion residents had registered to receive a biometric Aadhaar identification, which involves a unique 12-digit number and each registrant's fingerprint.

Challenges Adoption of Aadhaar numbers remains voluntary. The Indian Supreme Court has not yet determined whether requiring all citizens to sign up for the technology would be a violation of privacy.

Buzz ⬆

LINKEDIN

"We've made changes so that the emails you receive are more infrequent and more relevant."

Erica Lockheimer
Director of engineering growth, LinkedIn

Milestones The business-connection platform's user base has now reached 400 million worldwide. LinkedIn has grown significantly in China, where membership increased by 9 million in a little over seven months, and in India, where registered users have now surpassed the 33 million mark.

Challenges In October, the company paid \$13 million in order to settle a class-action lawsuit that accused it of sending out spam emails to users' list of connections without permission.

Buzz ⬆



PROTEUS DIGITAL HEALTH

Milestones The medical-technology startup is seeking FDA approval for the first-ever integration of a sensor into a drug. Proteus is embedding its technology—which was approved in 2012—inside pills containing the antipsychotic drug Abilify, allowing caregivers to see whether or not patients are actually taking their medication.

Challenges Some bioethicists are worried about the possibility of the sensor being used to violate the privacy of patients.

Buzz ⬆

Brewing up change

STARBUCKS

Riding through Ferguson, Missouri, one day last January, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz decided to invest in the community, which five months earlier had been the site of massive protests against police brutality. Schultz asked Rodney Hines, Starbucks's director of community investments, to lead the project and also to identify other low- and medium-income neighborhoods that might benefit from

new Starbucks stores. "Are we absent from some communities, and where should we be present?" Hines asked. "And how do we be present in a way that is an advantage to this community?"

By 2018, Starbucks will open at least 15 new outlets in underserved locations such as Jamaica, Queens, and Chicago's South Side, all staffed by local residents. The Ferguson Starbucks, meanwhile, opens this spring. "Going into these communities isn't a completely new endeavor for Starbucks," says Hines. "What we're trying to do is really codify this, so we can make more systemic changes to how we do business and connect our brand to these customers."

Milestones Starbucks had a stellar Q4, during which the company raked in \$4.9 billion in revenue—a 16% increase from the same period in 2014.

Challenges A new delivery service, powered by California-based startup Postmates, has gotten lukewarm reviews from customers.

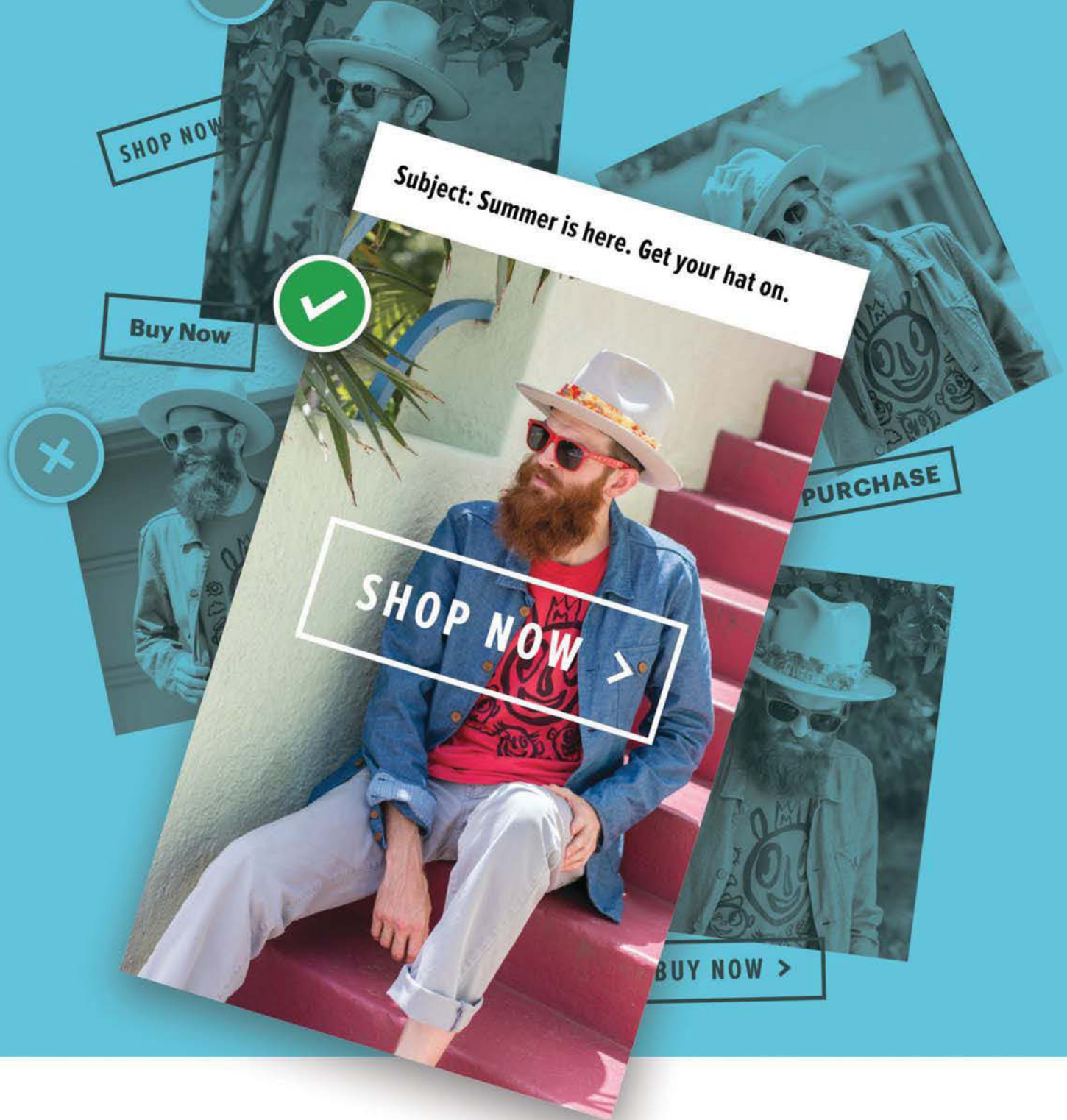
Buzz ⬆

"Being socially responsible is integral and sustainable for us."

Rodney Hines
Director of community investments, Starbucks



Captain Starbucks
CEO Schultz is opening outlets in underserved communities.



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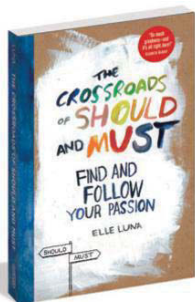
"The Frédéric Malle **Fleur Mecanique** diffuser looks cool in my home. It's also wireless and rechargeable."

Justin Fuisz
Founder and CEO, Fuisz Media



"**Thrive Market's** social mission is to make healthy food available to everyone by creating an online platform that sells in bulk at a discount and allows you to filter by food type, like gluten-free, vegan, or paleo."

Anna Kaiser
Founder and CEO, AKT InMotion



"Elle Luna is an incredibly talented San Francisco-based artist and designer. She created the user interface for Uber and most recently wrote an amazing book called **The Crossroads of Should and Must: Find and Follow Your Passion.**"

Jonathan Wegener
Cofounder and CEO, Timehop



"The ceramics at **Artshack Brooklyn** are gorgeous, and you will never find anything else like them. Everything is conceived and designed by kids, then refined and made into fine ceramics. Whoa."

Danika Laszuk
VP of marketing, Jawbone

THE GLOBE-TROTTER'S BLACK BOOK

1

FOR GREEN GETAWAYS

"**Tri** is Sri Lanka's first sustainable-design hotel. It's built entirely from local materials, and its location is stunning, overlooking Koggala Lake."

Tom Marchant
Cofounder, Black Tomato

2

FOR FEELING LIKE A LOCAL

"**Dojo** is a concert, restaurant, and bar app for Paris and London that gives you 'must-do' activities every day. And it's integrated with Uber and Citymapper."

Alexandre Ali
COO, Rad

3

FOR WILD ADVENTURES

"One of my favorite places is the **Lodge at Lewa Downs** resort in Kenya. You get to see the animals up close and personal."

Laura Niklason
Founder, Humacyte;
Fast Company MCP



YOU CAN'T BUILD THE BUSINESS OF TOMORROW ON THE NETWORK OF YESTERDAY.

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"I spent a great afternoon at the 1911 Tasting Room in upstate New York. The **Rosé Hard Cider** is not too sweet and comes in a nice wine-bottle size."

Caitlin Kenney

Head of new show development, Gimlet Media



"**Poncho** sends you the weather forecast in the form of a joke or animated GIF. It's data-driven but still whimsical. It is one email I always look forward to."

Hilary Mason

Founder, Fast Forward Labs; Fast Company MCP



"I buy skin-care products at **2 Note**, a music-themed store and website. Everything smells amazing and is made on-premise: face scrubs, bath salts, and perfume."

Heather Jassy

SVP of members and community, Etsy

SCHOOL OF ROCK



1

HISTORY LESSON

"**Don't Think I've Forgotten** is a heartbreaking documentary about the incredible Cambodian music scene of the '60s and '70s, which existed until the Khmer Rouge seized the country."

James Minor General manager, South by Southwest Music Festival



2

BAND PRACTICE

"**Utab** is a social network for people looking for music to play. As a pianist, I enjoy the beautifully built product that makes figuring out chords for your favorite songs like a real-life version of *Guitar Hero*."

Ariel Napchi

CEO, Hiro



3

RECESS

"I just bought a new album, **Glitterbug**, by the British band the Wombats. It's indie music that doesn't take itself too seriously."

Todd McKinnon

Cofounder and CEO, Okta

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From left:
BuzzFeed publisher
Dao Nguyen,
Motion Pictures
president Ze Frank,
and CEO Jonah
Peretti keep
BuzzFeed weird—
and powerful—by
never getting too
comfortable.



1 ► BUZZFEED

For shaking up media across the globe

BY NOAH ROBISCHON

Photographs by Eric Ogden



Ask **BuzzFeed** CEO Jonah Peretti about his influences, and his answer sounds like, well, a BuzzFeed post—one titled “The Three Historical References That Explain BuzzFeed Will Make You Say WTF.” Peretti first points to a company that started more than 100 years ago, Paramount Pictures, which owned a film production studio, its own cast of talent, and its own distribution channel in the form of theaters. “That allowed them to adapt and change as the market changed,” says Peretti.

Peretti’s second fascination is with CNN—how founder Ted Turner ran a 24-hour news operation at a fraction of the cost of what the networks spent, due in part to prescient use of satellite and cable technology.

And then there’s Jay Z. In the early 1990s, Peretti, who grew up in Oakland, California, attended public school where, he says, “The only music was black music.” The lyrics were full of boasts—selling more albums, earning more money, amassing more bling. Later in life when Peretti, now 42, made friends with people who loved indie rock bands, he

THREE REASONS WHY BEING A REDHEADED DATA GEEK AT BUZZFEED IS AWESOME

1. “When we’re going to evaluate a new platform, we say, ‘What kind of data can we get?’” says Jane Kelly (near right), a leader of BuzzFeed’s distributed data team, which focuses on BuzzFeed’s presence on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Vine, and many more. “We try to find metrics that [equate to] subscribers, content views, engagement (likes or shares), time spent, and impressions. The more of those you have, the more you can understand how the platform works.”

2. “We collect statistics on everything,” says Adam Kelleher (center), a data scientist working on Pound, a sharing-analysis tool that helps BuzzFeed learn how an article with 3 million views goes viral.

3. “It’s a real engineering challenge to be able to deal with the data at a scale that we have,” says Andrew Kelleher (far right), an engineer and Adam’s brother, who also works on Pound.



noticed “this weird thing where it’s like, the band that they love, they go to all their shows, but as soon as they have a record deal, ‘I don’t like them anymore.’” There was a similar attitude among bloggers, he says, who had a “deeply tortured relationship with popularity. The mainstream media is somehow evil, bad, or selling out.” Peretti didn’t share this angst. “With BuzzFeed, I always felt like, let’s have as big an impact as we can. Let’s grow this into something giant.”

Or, as Hova himself once rapped, “I’m so far ahead of my time, I’m bout to start another life / Look behind you, I’m bout to pass you twice.” BuzzFeed has built its success, like Paramount a century ago, by owning all the elements of a modern media business: a global news team, its own video production studio, a sophisticated data operation, and an in-house creative ad agency. Just as Ted Turner embraced cable before cable was cool, Peretti has pushed BuzzFeed to tailor its content to each emerging social channel, from Snapchat to Pinterest. And BuzzFeed is expanding globally, from the U.K. to Brazil, India to Mexico, Germany to Australia.

Much of this transformation has taken place within the past two years. The “bored-at-work network,” as Peretti himself once called it, was merely a single U.S. website. In late 2014, he foresaw that people wouldn’t want to leave their social apps, so Peretti drastically shifted his company’s strategy: Instead of trying to lure eyeballs to its own website, the way most publishers do, BuzzFeed would publish original text, images, and video directly to where its audience already spent its time, some 30 different global platforms, from Facebook to the Russian social networks VK and Telegram. Rather than write one definitive article and publish it on every platform (the de facto standard in the media business), BuzzFeed would tailor content specifically for the network and audience where it’s being viewed.



How'd that turn out? Across all the platforms where it now publishes content, the company generates 5 billion monthly views—half from video, a business that effectively did not exist two years ago. Traffic to the website has remained steady—80 million people in the U.S. every month, putting it ahead of *The New York Times*—even though as much as 75% of BuzzFeed's content is now published somewhere else.

This move also creates new revenue opportunities as services like Facebook, YouTube, and Snapchat seek to prove they can funnel money to partners who publish directly to their platforms. In the fourth quarter of 2014, “15% of our revenue was derived from video,” says BuzzFeed president Greg Coleman. “Fourth quarter of [2015], 35% of our total revenue is video.” The privately held BuzzFeed does not detail its financials, but leaked documents last summer revealed that the company was growing at about 200% annually, on pace to generate \$100 million in 2014, and was the rarest of things for an Internet startup: profitable.

BuzzFeed has become the envy of the media world for its

seemingly magical ability to engineer stories and ads that are shared widely—whether it's a dress that looks to be either white and gold or blue and black, an investigation into taxpayer-funded “ghost schools” in Afghanistan, or an older cat imparting wisdom to a kitten on behalf of Purina. Rivals in the insular media world carp that BuzzFeed is gaming Facebook's algorithm, or buying ads to pump up its content, and both are unsustainable; viral smashes like the dress are mere luck; even traditional brands such as *The Washington Post* can beat BuzzFeed with their own traffic-oriented gambits.

What's lost here is a true understanding of what Peretti, one of the world's most astute observers of Internet behavior, has built. The company's success is rooted in a dynamic, learning-driven culture; BuzzFeed is a continuous feedback loop where all of its articles and videos are the input for its sophisticated data operation, which then informs how BuzzFeed creates and distributes the advertising it produces. In a diagram showing how the system works, Peretti synthesized it down to “data, learning, dollars.”

Everyone who's ever shared a BuzzFeed post on Facebook thinks they understand the company. But to truly get it, one has to consider *all* of BuzzFeed, as I did during a months-long exploration of its video, data, editorial, and advertising operations. “If we actually learn what works on Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook,” Peretti says, “and we actually learn what works in Brazil and the U.K., and we can figure



"Brands have to figure out how not just to be sponsors, they need to become creators," says CMO Frank Cooper. "That's what we're trying to teach them."

out a way of sharing that knowledge, we should have a better understanding of how to make great content that people love." Peretti likens BuzzFeed's secret to a fleet of self-driving cars: Each car learns from every other autonomous vehicle on the road, so eventually they're all thousands of times smarter.

The other secret to BuzzFeed's success is a culture that embraces constant change yet remains devoted to data-driven metrics. That's a tricky combination, but essential for any company hoping to thrive in today's tumultuous business climate.

"I LOVE HOLLYWOOD. I LOVE MOVIES. I grew up on them. I love television shows," says Ze Frank, the head of BuzzFeed Motion Pictures. "The way that stuff is made, however, doesn't work necessarily in this environment."

Ironically, Frank, whose team publishes about 65 original videos every week—for YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, as well as for brands—is saying this from inside a

52,000-square-foot production studio on Sunset Boulevard in the heart of Los Angeles. There's a soundstage, a test kitchen, a prop room as large as a vintage store, two bungalows with rooms that serve as reusable indoor sets, and a clear view of the Hollywood sign from the roof. In short, the new digs have everything one would expect in a traditional movie studio.

But Frank, a performer whose rubber-faced, staccato monologues on *The Show* back in 2006 created the aesthetic for the first wave of YouTube stars, runs a decidedly non-Hollywood shop. There's a refreshing lack of pretension, in part because he's avoided the hyperspecialized model used in traditional video production where a writer might never see a gaffer or even understand what that person does. (It's the chief electrician on set, in case you're wondering.) Everyone at BuzzFeed Motion Pictures is "multihyphenated," says Ella Mielniczenko, 25, a writer-producer-performer for the series *You Do You*, an all-female scripted comedy that you could binge-watch along with *Girls*. "I can write better because I understand how I'm going to execute it and make it," she tells me. "I can direct better because I know what it's like to be in front of the camera."

Frank's multihyphenates are organized into teams—often color-coded—of no more than seven people, each devoted to a type of video, such as those that promote racial equality ("If Latinos Said the Stuff White People Say") and "franchise" formats such as Reaction videos ("Celebs Watch Animal Births") and Moments ("Awkward Moments You Know Too Well"). To ensure that no one gets complacent, the entire staff is reorganized into different teams every three months. Frank believes that this keeps the creative process from becoming calcified and helps producers unlearn habits. "There's this highly articulated way of making video that started 100 years ago," says Frank, who has overseen the making of more than 7,000 videos in the three years since Peretti got him to join BuzzFeed by acquiring his startup. "The modern opportunity necessarily means that you have to question almost every one of those decisions. Things like, 'Should we be talking about story as the prime vehicle for video versus a moment or a character?'"

Mielniczenko's series epitomizes BuzzFeed's updated approach. *You Do You* focuses on the interplay among the main characters, Ashly, Ella, Quinta, and Sara, as they explore particular moments in their lives. The narrative arc that's woven through the episodes—going to a friend's wedding together—is secondary at best. Last fall, BuzzFeed decided to bundle the 12 episodes of *You Do You* for \$2.99 on iTunes, the first time it sold its content directly to the public. The series hit No. 1 on the Top TV Seasons chart the week after its release, beating *The Walking Dead* and *Fargo*.

BuzzFeed's video plans also include a partnership with Comcast's NBCUniversal (which invested \$200 million last summer) around the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio. While NBC works on its traditional (and arguably calcified) "up close and personal" TV segments on prospective American Olympians, BuzzFeed was invited to film its own interviews. They asked the athletes goofy questions, such as, "Have you ever seen a live turkey?"—and then unleashed a turkey on set to capture athletes' reactions. The result is "a video that they think is going to go mega-vi," says NBCUniversal CEO Steve Burke. That's shorthand for "mega-viral," by the way—and no, Burke had never heard the term before either.

IF BUZZFEED MOTION PICTURES feels chaotic—as if there's a live turkey on set every day—it's because that's exactly what Peretti wants. "If everyone is in some highly (Continued on page 114)

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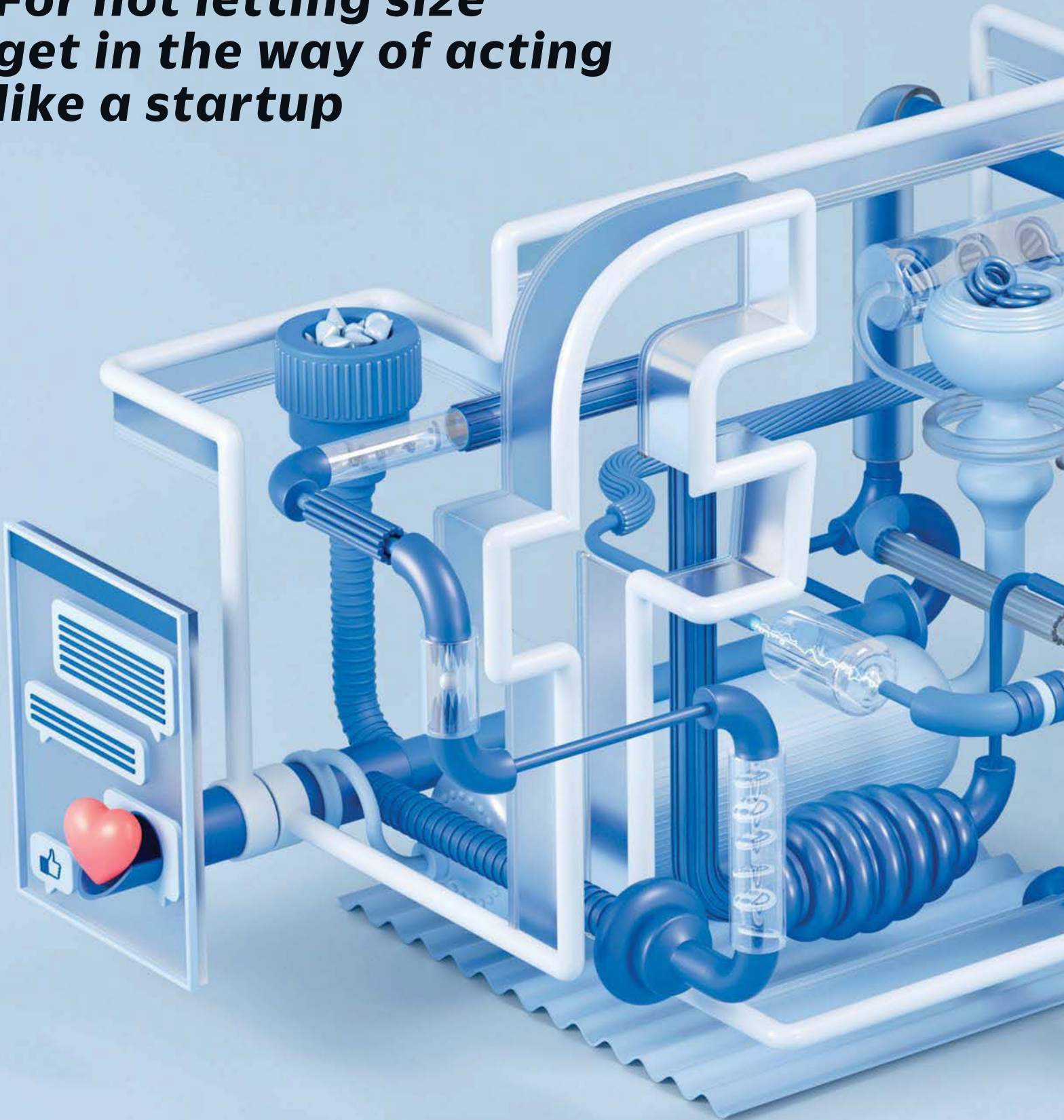
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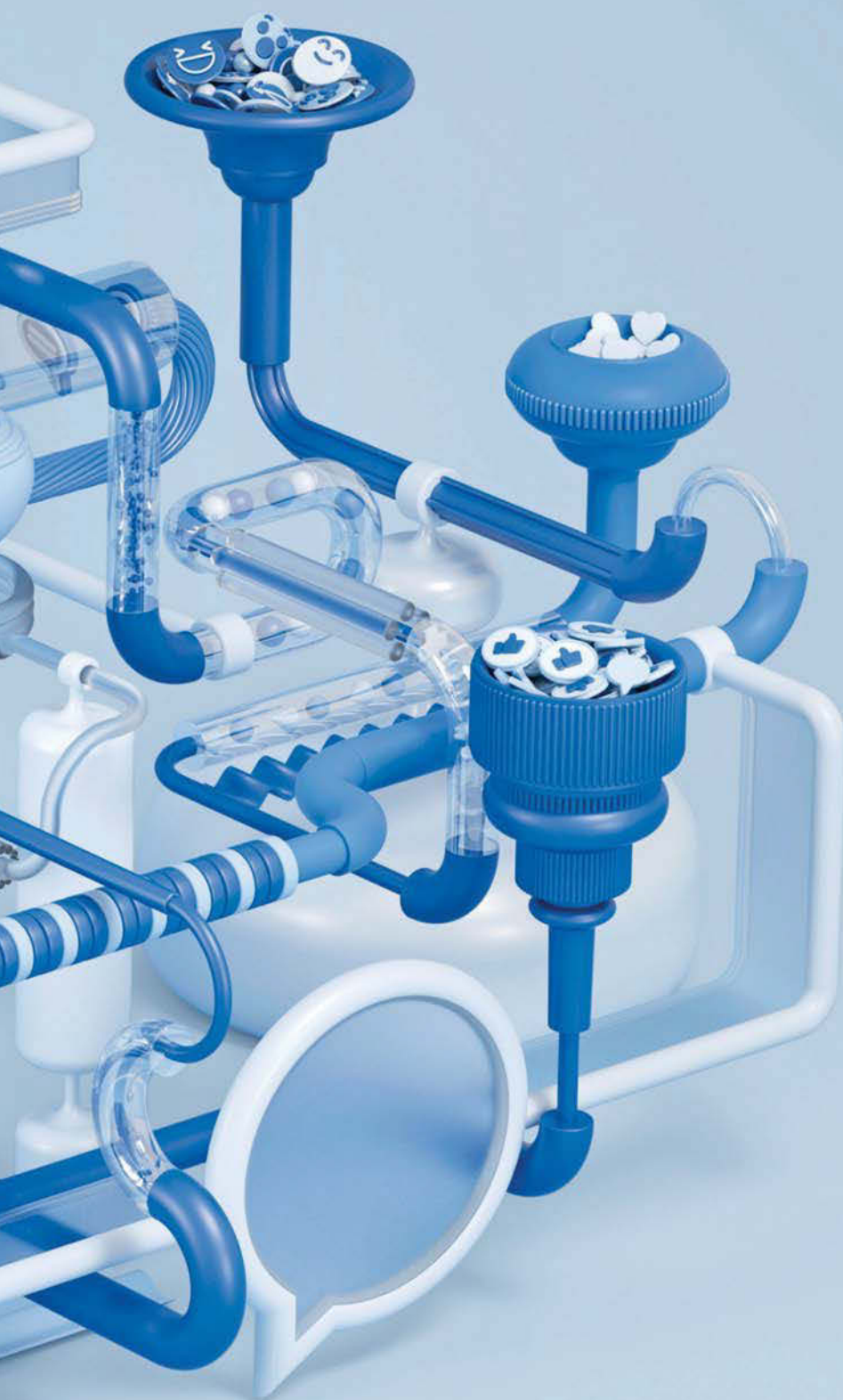
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For not letting size get in the way of acting like a startup





Facebook's financial performance is to die for—\$17 billion in 2015 revenue, a blistering 58% growth rate—but it's the steady confidence with which it's improving that makes it a killer. The new Instant Articles platform has smoothed out the process of sharing content for publishers, while offering readers ultrafast story downloads. Facebook's efforts to encourage direct video uploads have helped push daily views from 1 billion to 8 billion in just over a year. And the 10-month-old Moments app, which backs up photos and leverages the company's growing prowess in artificial intelligence for sharing suggestions, is increasingly popular.

Facebook's fastest-growing app is Messenger, which also uses AI to help businesses interact more naturally with their customers. Some of these

applications are pure fun: When Disney unleashed Miss Piggy on Messenger to talk to fans, her answers were powered by Facebook's machine learning. Others, like the company's digital assistant, M, help users find whatever they want via both computer and human intelligence.

All these moves are evidence that Facebook is becoming adept at incubating products within the service itself, letting them get popular, and then spinning them out into important freestanding services. The thread that connects these efforts is Facebook's central, though underappreciated, principle: to make the interactions between users—whether they're individuals, businesses, or content creators—feel special, even as the complex social infrastructure behind them fades into the background. Exactly as it should.



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3 ► CVS HEALTH

For becoming a one-stop health shop



1 Just say “no”

Though sales of cigarettes and other tobacco products brought CVS \$2 billion in annual revenue, Merlo viewed them as “a barrier to our long-term growth.” The decision to end the company’s tobacco business may have raised eyebrows, but it refreshed CVS’s reputation overnight.



2 On-demand health care

CVS has doubled down on its MinuteClinics, in-store walk-in medical facilities that offer patients quick and inexpensive access to health care professionals. Now, thanks to the growing roster of more than 1,100 clinics around the country, roughly 50% of the U.S. population lives within 10 miles of one.



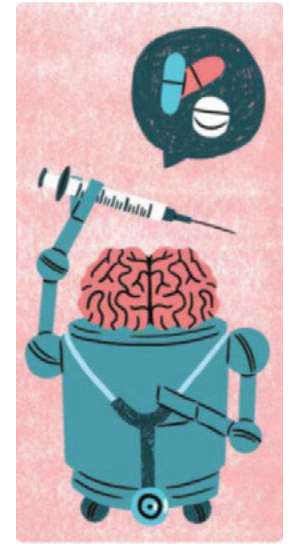
3 Full-service stores

In October, CVS launched a program offering optical and hearing exams. The high-margin services are only at a dozen stores now, but it’s a sign of how much the company is expanding to become an all-in-one shop where you might pick up both toothpaste and prescription lenses.



4 Redesigned wellness

In the past year, CVS has remodeled nearly 500 locations to push healthier food alternatives to customers at checkout. It also rolled out Gold Emblem Abound, its own line of wholesome snacks. “What we hear from customers is, ‘How can you educate me on what might be healthier?’” says Merlo.



5 Predictive medicine

In July, CVS and IBM announced a partnership that will have the two companies leveraging the Watson supercomputer to chart behavioral patterns and eventually raise red flags when, say, people are not properly adhering to their prescriptions or their health is declining.

CVS Health isn’t content merely to be a \$153 billion drug-store chain. It wants to completely redefine retail health care. “About half of our patients come on nights and weekends,” says CEO Larry Merlo. “About half of our patients don’t have a primary-care physician.” That’s why CVS has bet on in-store clinics—just one of the ways in which Merlo has made the company synonymous with storefront health care innovation.

4 ► UBER

For hustling corporate business

75,000

That’s how many companies have signed up for Uber for Business since its 2014 launch. Among its recent exploits, Uber leveraged its consumer dominance to woo firms into letting users create separate profiles for work rides and introduced UberEvents, which enables companies to prearrange transport. Emil Michael, Uber’s SVP of business, credits employees with company adoption: “It’s like millennials coming into work and asking to connect their iPhones into IT.”

5 ► NETFLIX

For giving unexpected audiences exactly what they want

Having established itself as a purveyor of binge-worthy shows such as *House of Cards* and *Orange Is the New Black*, in 2015 Netflix ramped up its plan to become the first global online entertainment network: It released a new original title on the service every one and a half weeks—and then rang in the new year by bringing its service to an additional 130 countries and planning more than 700 hours of new programming. Netflix—which has nearly 70 million subscribers and has seen its stock rise 500% over the past five years—is laser-targeting demos to give them at least one title they can’t live without. Older viewers were treated to *Grace and Frankie*, starring Jane Fonda; *Between* spoke to teens; Spanish-language audiences could watch *Narcos* and *Club de Cuervos*; *Master of None*, with its immigrant themes, found traction with comedy nerds; and indie-movie buffs got the first Netflix original film, *Beasts of No Nation*, which was simultaneously rolled out in theaters.



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6 ► AMAZON

7 ► APPLE

8 ► ALPHABET

For morphing tech into something new before our very eyes



Amazon

For evolving from commerce to cool cloud services

When Amazon introduced its first web services in 2006, the move left plenty of people flummoxed. Almost a decade later, nobody's confused. Amazon Web Services is now an \$8 billion business, and in the most recent quarter, its operating income rivaled that of the company's entire North American e-commerce operations. AWS has more than 1 million customers, but the most important one

is Amazon. Its cloud mastery has informed many of its prominent new consumer offerings, notably Amazon Prime Video and Alexa, the inventive voice-powered assistant available for its Echo speaker and Fire tablet. Those newer services drive Prime memberships, which create the e-commerce division's slim profit margins.

Apple

For acing its China test

Seven years after pundits opined that Apple's Beijing store would have trouble moving phones, China now accounts for 25% of the

company's total revenue, with sales doubling every year. "If you look back five years, China's middle class had about 50 million people," Tim Cook told investors last October, "and if you look ahead five years, it will have 10 times that number. I feel like we are reasonably well positioned in China." That's an understatement: iPhone 6 was the number one-selling smartphone in mainland China at the end of 2015. And the iPhone 6 Plus, such a perfect fit for the Chinese market? Number two. This popularity is also spurring App Store revenue, which in China grew 127% in 2015; the country today boasts 1 million iOS developers. By the end of 2016, Apple

will have 40 retail outposts in Chinese cities, up from 12 in 2013. Flagship stores around the world are hiring Mandarin speakers to cater to Chinese travelers too.

Alphabet

For devising a better way to bet big

Google cofounder Larry Page's announcement of Alphabet, a new holding company that would house Google and convert many of his wildly forward-looking technical pursuits into their own operating units, signaled a brilliant strategic play. The move allowed Page to step away

from day-to-day management of Google; it quieted skeptics who carp about Google chasing dreams with no obvious connection to its core advertising business; and it empowered these ambitious projects to move faster. While questions remain about Alphabet's mechanics, the reinvention has already borne fruit. Nest released its third-generation thermostat and is reportedly racing ahead on new augmented-reality glasses; Access is targeting larger cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago for its gigabit broadband service. Alphabet has also fostered new moon shots such as combating malaria and dengue fever with GMO mosquitoes.



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"We are everyday people doing extraordinary things," says Garza, cofounder of Black Lives Matter.



"When people describe us, they say, 'They're leaderless,'" says Black Lives Matter cofounder Alicia Garza. "We just don't have one leader. We have many leaders who are empowered to make decisions and guide strategy in their communities based on what makes sense for their local context." Historically, the most effective sociopolitical movements have coalesced around single leaders like Dr. King and Gloria Steinem. Black Lives Matter stands out for empowering each of its more than 30 chapters worldwide to take action when and where they see fit, tapping into the support and resources of the wider organization. This fluidity has enabled activists to move quickly to organize headline-

grabbing protests from New York to Minneapolis and even crash presidential campaign rallies to press for a more substantive discussion of race in the run-up to the election. "We all come together through a network structure when we want to maximize our impact," says Garza. In 2015 alone, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter reverberated through Twitter more than 9 million times, while high-level officials—including police chiefs in Baltimore and Chicago and the president of the University of Missouri—were forced to resign in the wake of pressure over racial incidents and their cover-ups. Forty new laws—mandating body cameras and bias training for police and restricting excessive force—have been enacted across 24 states, in large part thanks to Black Lives Matter, which continues to push for more accountability from public officials. "Twenty years from now, I would love for us to be able to say that we made some really important gains," says Garza. "That we built political power for black people, economic power for black people, and social power for black people."

9 ► BLACK LIVES MATTER

For turning the conversation about race into results

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10 ► TACO BELL

For combining corn, beans, meat, and cheese into genius

BY JONATHAN RINGEN

Photographs by Sarah Illenberger



On a recent evening, Taco Bell CEO Brian Niccol was hanging out at his Newport Beach, California, home when an idea popped into his head—a menu item designed to appeal to young, ravenously hungry customers on their way home after a night of partying. Niccol, 42, was thinking about his days as an engineering student at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where he had a favorite lunch spot with a simple gimmick. “We went to this place called Bagel & Deli that had all these great names for their sandwiches,” he says, sitting on a sofa in his large, comfortable corner office at Taco Bell’s Irvine, California, headquarters. “I was like, ‘Why haven’t we thought of having great names for our burritos?’” (Taco Bell’s current offerings tend to have monikers like “Shredded Chicken Burrito” or “Beefy 5-Layer Burrito.”) He fired off a text to Taco Bell’s chief food innovation officer, Liz Matthews, that included a name borrowed from Bagel & Deli: “the After Burner.” Niccol didn’t give many further instructions. Whatever those two words might conjure in the minds of Matthews and her crew of chefs and food scientists would be the starting point. “What’s in the burrito?” he says in his office a few days later. “I don’t know! Make it up.”

From an outsider’s perspective, the After Burner seems like a less-than-ideal name; with Chipotle battling food-poisoning issues, you’d think a Mexican fast-food chain would avoid any suggestion that a





burrito might cause burning in your, you know, *after*. And given how many ideas are constantly in play in the test kitchen, the odds of this particular flash of inspiration making it to your local Taco Bell are low. But whatever happens, there's a strong chance that the process of thinking about it will have reaped real rewards. Because at Taco Bell, in a way that's unique to its industry, wild ideas are the whole enchilada, and a large part of Niccol's strategy is to create a structure that taps into as many as possible. "Sometimes people in my position get pleasure out of demonstrating they're smarter than everybody," says the CEO, who has a bit of a Don Draper-in-California vibe and is wearing a blue plaid sport coat, an open-collar shirt, dark-wash jeans, and expensive-looking loafers. "I don't get any pleasure out of that. I get pleasure from coming across something that I hadn't thought of, giving it a whirl, and seeing if it works."

At a time when "fast casual" brands like Shake Shack and Sweetgreen have people lining up around the block for all-natural burgers and signature grain bowls, a 54-year-old chain that specializes in dollar-menu items like Beefy Fritos Burritos might seem about as forward-looking as cafeteria meat loaf. But if you peel open the paper wrapper and really look inside, Taco Bell turns out to have become one of the restaurant world's most aggressive innovators, in a way that has remade both its menu and its business. It often functions more like a tech company than a fast-food chain, relentlessly rethinking every aspect of its business in an effort to improve its products, its marketing, and the way customers experience the brand.

That change can be traced back to 2012, when, after years of testing, the company launched Doritos Locos Tacos, which swap the regular shell for a nacho-cheesier one. In just the first year, Taco Bell sold more than \$1 billion worth of the blockbuster mashup, helping drive five straight years of growth. Since then, the company has revitalized its menu with new items and a steady stream of limited-time treats.

It has paid off. Pre-DLT (acronyms are big at Taco Bell), the chain had fewer than 6,000 U.S. outlets. Now there are more than 6,500, with plans to add 1,000 more. The company is also continuing an international expansion, launching in markets such as India, Japan, Korea, and Spain. Revenue increased from \$8.2 billion in 2014 to \$9 billion last year, and 220 stores opened in 2015. A big part of that growth has been due to breakfast, which Taco Bell started serving in 2014 and quickly grew to rival McDonald's.

Along the way, the company has rolled out attention-grabbing limited-time items such as Cap'n Crunch Delights (icing-filled doughnut holes encrusted with cereal) and last summer's DareDevil Loaded Grillers (burritos spiked with a range of hot peppers and cleverly marketed as a "How spicy can you go?" \$1 dare). "Every five weeks we introduce something new, which becomes about 5% of what people buy on our menu," says the head of Taco Bell's Insights Lab, Melissa Friebe, who does innovation research for every part of the company. "Even though

that number isn't huge, it drives the urgency to come to our stores. A segment of people are really attracted to those things."

Meanwhile, Taco Bell has transformed the way it communicates with customers, putting an intense focus on social media. The company has become famous for stunts like its annual Friendsgiving, where Internet influencers such as Chrissy Teigen are invited to feast on a special tasting menu and document the party on Instagram and Snapchat. It's part of a broader campaign to transform Taco Bell into the most media-savvy, buzz-generating brand in the fast-food world. "If you have the belief that there's still work to be done, then you'll figure out how to break a little glass," says Niccol, who arrived at Taco Bell in 2011 as the head of marketing and innovation, after a stint at Yum Brands' corporate sibling Pizza Hut (the company also owns KFC). "That's what gets me excited. I think we've got a culture here that's excited about that as well."

THE SECOND FLOOR of Taco Bell's headquarters—located at One Glen Bell Way, a nod to the man who in 1962 opened the first Taco Bell restaurant—houses a complex of test kitchens that hum with activity. One of Matthews's cooks is stirring an industrial-size pot of sauce in the Innovation Kitchen, while down the hall, in a room that resembles a small lecture hall built around a perfect copy of a Taco Bell restaurant kitchen, 15 people have gathered for a recurring event known as Creations, where outside consultants are invited to cook up their visions for Taco Bell's future.

For today's installment, chefs from Taco Bell's major suppliers have been tasked with creating new food experiences designed to appeal to Taco Bell's youngest customers, the post-millennials usually referred to as generation Z. A cross-section of team members, including representatives from marketing, insights, and food innovation, are surrounded by tools of the trade: oversize cups of palate-cleansing soda, stacks of napkins, and, crucially, large garbage cans that serve approximately the same function as spittoons at wine tastings. (It's a marathon event.) Their mission is to try out the chefs' creations and run with any idea that seems promising. "From an innovation perspective, I'd love it if we had one person who just comes up with great ideas," Matthews says with a laugh. "But it doesn't work that way. The strategy is getting different people together, having food around, and having conversations."

It's not that young people like totally different things. "We study gen Z not just because we want to target them, but because we want to get ahead in culture and we want to predict what's going to happen," says Friebe, who is overseeing the proceedings. "And also because youth is what our brand DNA is about." According to some research that the chefs at the event have been given to work with, young people's favorite foods are rotisserie chicken,

"IT USED TO JUST BE ABOUT HOW COOL THE FOOD IS. NOW IT'S ALMOST LIKE HOW YOU GET THE FOOD NEEDS TO BE AS COOL AS THE FOOD ITSELF."



burgers, steaks, and (promisingly!) tacos. But they do gravitate toward certain preferences, especially natural, healthy food. To that end, one chef offers up roasted veggie quinoa tacos, while another serves a salad based on elote, or Mexican-style corn on the cob. A chef named David brings out what he describes as an “umami bomb”: a vegetarian, gluten-free concoction called a mushroom raja taco. It’s a big hit, and the rajas—strips of peppers roasted until they become crispy—are specifically noted for future study.

Gen Z also tends to be more excited about spicy food than their parents or older siblings, an insight that has inspired one chef to create a legit-delicious concoction called the Yellowbird

Queso Quesalupa with Kimchi Fried Rice. (Yellowbird, a sriracha-ish hot sauce from Austin, has been a source of considerable interest at Taco Bell recently.) “Americans are starting to love the challenge of spicier stuff,” says chief product marketing officer Stephanie Perdue, who arrived at Taco Bell after a stint in movie marketing at 20th Century Fox. “At least with fast food, I don’t think that there are a lot of options out there.”

This idea-generation process isn’t just limited to food: Every aspect of the chain’s operations is constantly up for reinvention, from packaging to restaurant design to marketing. Meredith Sandland, Taco Bell’s chief development officer, is leading a team that’s dreaming up new ways of configuring the restaurants, including an open-kitchen taco-making setup that lets customers see the ingredients and preparation. (She tells me this idea comes from Taco Bell’s Asian outlets, although it’s also not so different from the way Chipotle works.) She is also leading Taco Bell’s ongoing effort to refocus on urban centers, which began with the recent debut of upscale, liquor license-equipped Taco Bell outlets in San Francisco and Chicago that include the open-kitchen concept. Meanwhile, chief marketing officer Marisa Thalberg (an Estée Lauder veteran) and her group are constantly rolling out attention-generating social media campaigns. The supply chain is also in flux, with new corporate-responsibility initiatives under way, including the elimination of high-fructose corn syrup and artificial ingredients, as well as a pledge to move to cage-free eggs by the end of the year.

One of the new food innovations the company is most excited about—a concept that everyone seems to believe will become another Doritos

Locos-level blockbuster—came out of this same sort of brainstorming process. In 2012, Taco Bell started working on an idea that combines two of its core products, the chalupa and the quesadilla, into one mega-cheesy item: the Quesalupa. Picture an amped-up taco that replaces the regular shell with a special chalupa stuffed full of cheese—a sort of south-of-the-border take on stuffed-crust pizza. The filling is just regular ingredients: ground beef, lettuce, tomatoes, more cheese, sauce. But somehow the Quesalupa offers a texture-flavor synthesis that achieves an almost otherworldly ideal of the cheesy, the beefy, the crunchy, and the craveable—all adjectives you hear a lot if you spend any time at One Glen Bell Way. The thing, in Taco Bell-speak, has epic cheese pull: Bite into one and fat ribbons of perfectly elastic pepper jack form a weirdly satisfying bridge between your hand and your mouth.

The Quesalupa underwent three years of testing and (Continued on page 116)

For removing all the barriers to stock trading

Robinhood's Tenev (left) and Bhatt dream of a world where a new generation can invest with the ease of ordering an Uber.





There may be no better “Why didn’t anyone think of this sooner?” product than Robinhood, which brings stock trading into the modern era with a stunningly designed mobile app and a no-minimums, free-trades policy. Cofounders Baiju Bhatt and Vlad Tenev were Stanford roommates and friends who graduated into the teeth of the 2008 financial crisis and got their start helping the likes of UBS execute high-frequency trading more efficiently. As those transaction costs neared zero, Bhatt recalls wondering, Why are online brokerages still so expensive? Watching their peers become disillusioned by Wall Street further inspired the idea of creating a new kind of financial services company.

The pent-up demand for Robinhood led 600,000 people to join the wait list to download the app before it debuted in March 2015. Robinhood has gone on to convert hundreds

of thousands of those folks into customers, who have so far traded more than \$2 billion via the app, saving \$50 million in trading commissions. The company currently generates revenue and earns interest off of customers’ cash balances (the “float”), and it is launching premium services such as trading on margin.

Part of the reason for Robinhood’s success is its design. The app is incredibly fast and intelligently prioritizes the information you care about most. “How often do you check your account value?” Bhatt asks rhetorically. “That’s the number-one thing. You look at it quickly, get what you want, and feel connected to your money.” Many users check more than 20 times a week. Scroll down for individual stocks; click on one for clear charts and the latest headlines. The first financial app ever to win an Apple Design award, Robinhood knows how to keep users coming back.



12 ► UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

For breaking the box-office record with canny casting and marketing

When Universal reached the \$5 billion global box-office mark last July, it got there faster than any other studio in history. It did it with a combination of smart, against-type casting and a new approach to marketing that pays equal attention to traditional and digital media in order to draw in audiences wherever they may be. Here are five films that demonstrate how Universal has pulled off its Very Big Year.

Jurassic World

The studio took a risk with director Colin Trevorrow, who had just one indie film to his name. By staying true to the emotional depth of Spielberg's original, he made a summer blockbuster that was more than just dinosaur mayhem. Star Chris Pratt brought humor and charisma to an otherwise thinly sketched character. Universal, meanwhile, created an immersive *Jurassic World* destination website, attracting 3 million people and proving that dinosaurs, when presented imaginatively, never get old.

PRODUCTION COSTS \$150 million
WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE \$1.6 billion



Furious 7

In the midst of filming, star Paul Walker was killed in a car accident. The dilemma, according to Michael Moses, Universal's copresident of worldwide marketing: "How do we get the audience past the tragedy and into, it's still okay to enjoy a *Fast & Furious* movie?" The film became a tribute, with Walker's brothers shooting his remaining scenes. Cast members took to social media to post photos of the star and encourage fans to do the same with the hashtag #ForPaul.

PRODUCTION COSTS \$190 million
WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE \$1.5 billion

Trainwreck

Despite her own Comedy Central show, Amy Schumer was still largely unknown to mainstream America at this time last year. But her raunchy candor and postfeminist truth-telling killed it on the big screen, aided by Bill Hader's sweet, slightly offbeat foil. Universal adeptly primed the pump, getting early buzz by premiering a "work in progress" version of the movie at South by Southwest. Even by Austin standards (audiences at the festival tend to be generous), the film and its cast were rapturously received.

PRODUCTION COSTS \$35 million
WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE \$139 million

Straight Outta Compton

This was the definition of a niche picture: a musical biopic about the gangsta rap group N.W.A. with a no-name cast. Moses recalls thinking, "We've got a movie that stars nobody." The antidote: producers Dr. Dre and Ice Cube tapped their music-industry connections to help promote the movie, and Universal created a "Straight Outta (fill in the blank)" meme generator that went viral. Critics and audiences, meanwhile, appreciated the film's timely depictions of racial tensions and police brutality.

PRODUCTION COSTS \$28 million
WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE \$200 million

Minions

Moving a trio of yellow, nonsense-babbling sidekicks to center stage might have seemed counterintuitive, but Universal had a plan: Heavy on physical gags, the Minions have incredible international appeal. When Universal released a Minions caroling video over Christmas 2014—a full seven months before the film's release—it became Facebook's most shared piece of content that year. The film became a huge hit in China and Russia, fueling its \$821 million international haul.

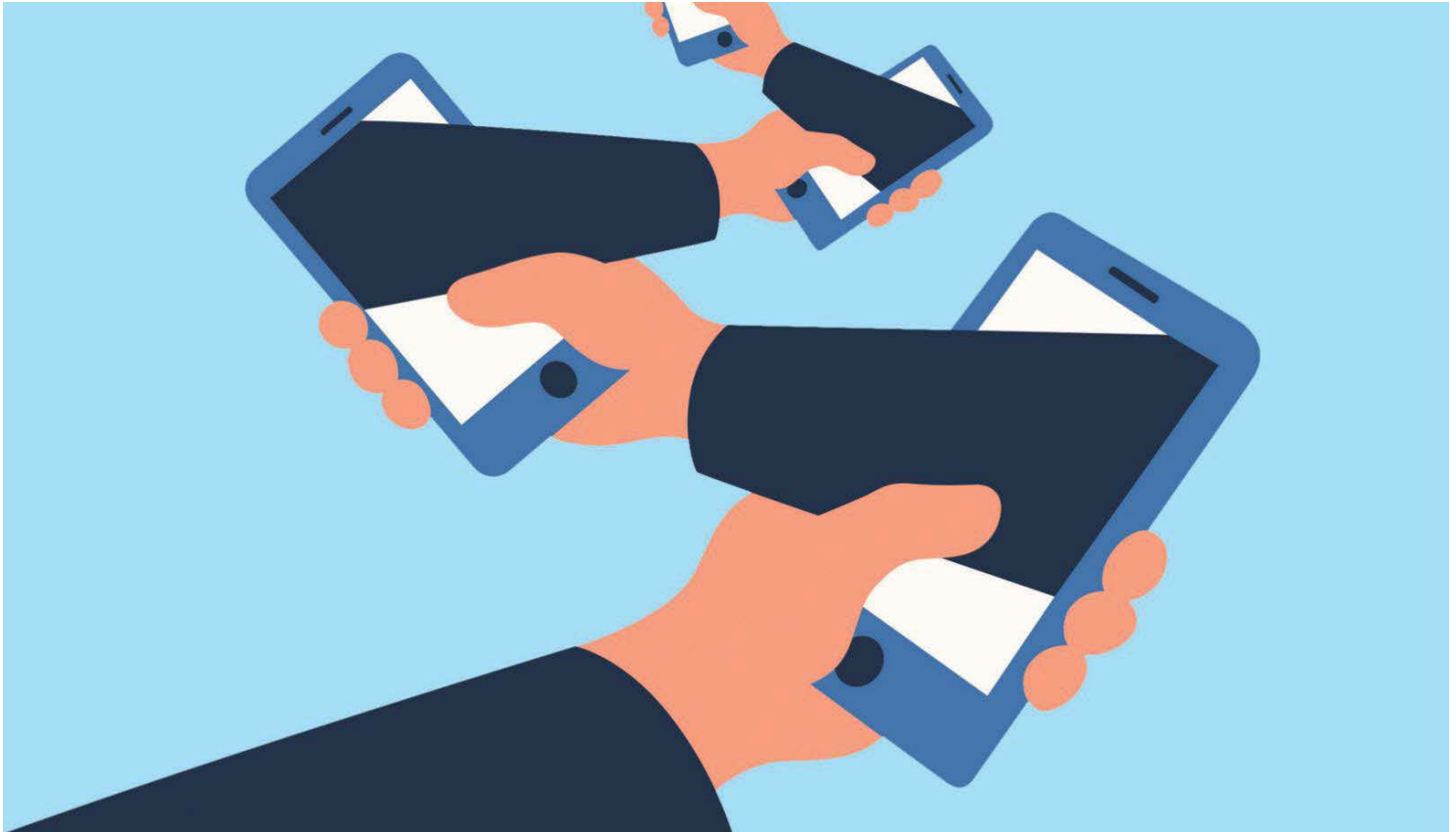
PRODUCTION COSTS \$74 million
WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE \$1.15 billion

13 ► HUAWEI

14 ► CYANOGEN

15 ► INMOBI

For taking the upper hand in the global mobile competition



	OPPORTUNITY	STRATEGY	2015 MOMENTUM	800 LB. RIVAL	SURPRISING ALLY	WHAT'S NEXT
Huawei	Consumers whose first phone was a Xiaomi are ready to trade up to a brand like Huawei with better design and quality.	Amasses tech expertise (and a supplier network) moonlighting as a private-label manufacturer.	Became China's biggest phone seller last fall; 35% revenue growth fueled by smartphone and consumer products.	Yes, Apple. Huawei may be ritzier than Xiaomi (average price: \$282 vs. \$149), but if you can afford an iPhone, you get it.	Alphabet, which worked with Huawei to make its flagship Google Nexus 6P, featuring a next-gen fingerprint sensor.	Smart-home products to rival Xiaomi and Samsung; coming to America with its high-end, six-inch (!) Mate 8.
Cyanogen	As Android grows bloated, Cyanogen offers a more open, customizable version of the world's dominant phone OS.	Woos handset makers in hyper-competitive markets like India by letting them modify their own software.	Deals with OnePlus, Lenovo, India's Micromax, and BQ-Telefonica to sell millions of Cyanogen handsets worldwide.	Google, which has become insistent that if device makers want Android, they have to take it Google's way.	Microsoft. Its deal offers Cortana and Skype on Cyanogen's OS as alternatives to Google Now and Voice.	Giving developers more access to its OS to innovate app experiences; finding a work-around to the Google Play store.
InMobi	InMobi's personalized mobile ads are a refreshing departure from intrusive, one-size-fits-all approaches.	Takes advantage of phones' sensors to serve up customized ads—and dominate in China and India.	Launched Miip to scan app behavior to curate deals; reach exceeded 1 billion phones worldwide; 75% revenue growth.	Google, which leads the \$100 billion mobile ad market—except in China, where it can't operate.	Dell—its data centers are helping InMobi scale its growing Miip network.	Burrowing deeper into phones via partnerships with Samsung and other handset makers.

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KEEP CLIMBING



DELTA



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16 ► NOVOCURE

17 ► BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB

18 ► AMGEN

For bringing creativity to the fight against cancer





Novocure

For attacking tumors with electricity

There are three major ways to fight cancer—cut it out, hit it with radiation, or pummel it with drugs. Novocure is the first company to successfully commercialize a promising fourth way: alternating electric field therapy. The Jersey Isle, U.K.-based company's portable Optune device sits directly on a patient's scalp to deliver low-intensity, alternating electric fields that inhibit tumor growth in the most common and aggressive type of brain cancer, called glioblastoma. Though Optune has been used for several years to help forestall glioblastoma that has progressed beyond

other therapies, the FDA recently approved it for use as a first-line treatment in conjunction with oral chemotherapy. The company also has clinical trials under way for non-small-cell lung cancer, pancreatic and ovarian cancer, mesothelioma, and other types of brain tumors.

Bristol-Myers Squibb

For treating tumors with T cells

While its competitors have been distracted by megamergers and corporate restructuring, Bristol-Myers Squibb has been acquiring small biotech companies with big ideas and speeding experimental treatments to market. This “string of pearls”

strategy has put BMS at the forefront of a powerful new class of cancer drugs called checkpoint inhibitors, which spur a patient's own T cells to fight tumors. In the past year, BMS has racked up approvals to deploy its checkpoint inhibitor Opdivo to treat renal, advanced melanoma, and non-small-cell lung cancers and to use it in combination with another of its inhibitors for metastatic melanoma. The five-year approval path for this first-ever combination immunotherapy for cancer was lightning fast by drug development standards, and BMS is following up by collaborating with other drugmakers to study new combinations. The checkpoint inhibitor market is projected to reach \$40 billion by 2020; BMS has staked out a dominant position.

Amgen

For making cancer therapy go viral

When Amgen spent \$1 billion for the cancer-focused lab BioVex in 2011, it was a big risk. Today, as one of the first to market with a so-called cancer-killing virus, Amgen is poised to shape the future of oncology. Unlike any other drug approved for human use, Amgen's Imlygic is a live, genetically modified virus (a version of the cold sore-causing herpes simplex). It infects cancer cells, replicates inside them, and kills them by popping their membrane like a balloon—releasing the virus to go hunting for more. Imlygic also has a genetic addition that may help generate an immune response, amplifying its impact. Last fall, the FDA and European Commission approved Imlygic to treat metastatic melanoma after clinical trials showed impressive response rates.

19 ► SPOTIFY

For finding the beat in the data



1

Running

To help people amp up their workouts, Spotify created Running, which matches tunes to your individual pace. “We said, ‘What if this digital music player could personalize not just based on your taste, but on the situation?’” Söderström says. “You’re going to see us take this approach elsewhere.”



2

Taste Rewind

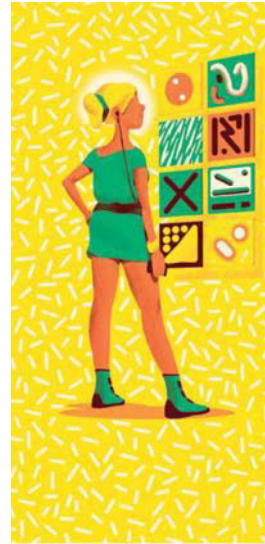
This lighthearted feature taps into your music preferences to predict what you would have listened to if Spotify had existed in the predigital era. “With all this data, it was possible to bring you back musically and say, ‘This is what you probably would have liked.’ That really resonated with people.”



3

Found Them First

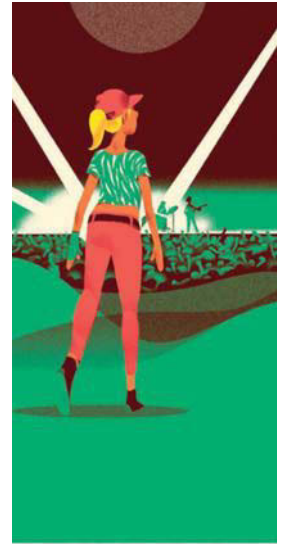
Another data-driven feature lets listeners find out which famous artists they knew about before the rest of the world caught on. “You have fans who say, ‘I discovered these guys before everyone else.’ A lot of people take pride in that, but they wonder, ‘How early was I?’ Well, we can just tell you.”



4

Discover Weekly

Spotify’s personalized playlists offer uncanny predictive accuracy: 71% of listeners add at least one track to their own lists. Söderström credits Spotify’s music intelligence platform, the Echo Nest, along with the very human work of metadata tagging the catalog over many years.



5

Fan Insights

This tool gives artists demographic, geographic, and other info about listeners. “Do they have a bunch of casual listeners or a smaller group who are really passionate? Where should they go on tour? The data is right in front of us, and we can give it to the constituent who could really use it.”

20 ► GE

For leading the Industrial Internet of Things

\$5 billion

2015 revenue from GE’s new cloud platform, Predix, and all the apps built on top of it. Predix enables customers (Boeing, Exelon, BP, and others) to analyze machine data from jet engines, wind turbines, freight trains, and the like—and issue commands to maximize their efficiency. “The Industrial Internet is going to be a combination of the physical and the analytical,” says CEO Jeff Immelt. “We bring a tremendous amount of credibility to that world.”

21 ► WARBY PARKER

For prescribing social good at home

The hip optical shop doubled its retail locations to 20 in the past year and experimented with a handful of non-eyewear products, from mugs to cookies, in order to “get permission to enter more categories in the future,” says co-CEO Dave Gilboa. At the same time, Warby Parker recommitted to its mission of bringing glasses to people who need them. Since its founding, it has distributed pairs throughout the developing world. Now, thanks to a new partnership with the City of New York, it’s helping to ensure that kids in high-needs schools back home receive eye exams—and, if necessary, free Warby Parker–designed frames. The company has also piloted a program with DonorsChoose.org to encourage teachers to partner with Warby Parker to provide free screenings and glasses for their students; it intends to refine and expand both initiatives. “Kids who can’t see the board can be disruptive and even misdiagnosed with ADHD,” says Gilboa. “The best time to intervene is in school.”



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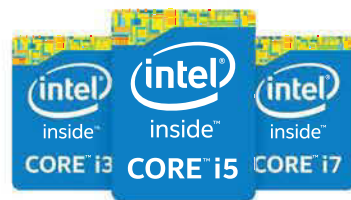
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22 ► RIOT GAMES

For being in an e-sports league of its own



When the multiplayer online game *League of Legends* held its 2015 World Championship Final in the packed Mercedes-Benz Arena in Berlin last October, 36 million people

watched online—nearly twice the audience of last year's NBA Finals. Riot Games cofounders Brandon Beck and Marc Merrill first introduced the world to *League of Legends* back

in 2009, when, Merrill says, live video-game competitions were “sort of analogous to track meets. They were cool opportunities for fans to come together, but the viewership and fan experience was severely limited.”

Today, e-sports is a nearly \$1 billion industry, complete with million-dollar prize winnings—and Riot Games is the dominant player. Riot now produces its own ESPN-like, online e-sports channel; oversees a system of divisions and tiers that

players progress through to reach the tournament level; and holds an annual North American Collegiate Championship, which awards nearly \$60,000 in scholarships. Riot has even been attracting major corporate sponsors, such as Coca-Cola and American Express. Meanwhile, the tournaments introduce more people to the free-to-play *League of Legends*, inspiring them to buy the in-game enhancements that helped the company generate an estimated \$1.5 billion in 2015 revenue.



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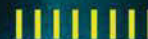


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23 ► FARFETCH

***For putting
the world's best
boutique-fashion
retailers on
a global stage***

**Are you a farfetishist?**

The passionate clientele of the e-commerce fashion site Farfetch helped it generate \$500 million in revenue in 2015—a sign of just how deeply founder and CEO José Neves's vision of creating a luxe, department store–like experience within a web browser is resonating with high-end shoppers from Texas to Tokyo. The platform, which rolls up more than 300 of the coolest boutiques in 35 countries into one site, “is about enabling the best curators of fashion wherever they are,” says Neves. Farfetch gives these store owners a way to reach customers across 190 countries, as well as the logistical intelligence for global same-day delivery, in-store returns, and multi-language customer service. According to Jonathan Pak, owner of New York City's fashion-forward Patron of the New boutique, Farfetch introduces stores such as his to new customers—and moves merchandise. “Certain brands sell much better through Farfetch and the purchases are bigger than on our own site,” says Pak. Since partnering with Farfetch in 2012, his year-over-year sales growth via the site has been 132%. Neves, meanwhile, continues to experiment with how to blur online and real-world commerce, by buying up the venerable British department store Browns and signing up more than 50 fashion labels, including Jason Wu and Derek Lam, to sell directly on Farfetch. “We’re creating the store of the future,” he says.

Pak, of New York City's Patron of the New, says shoppers are drawn to his store both online and in person after discovering it on Farfetch.



24 ► EVERLANE

For matching our clothes to our values



Everlane CEO Preysman with one of his women's boots in the company's San Francisco headquarters.



Here's a radical idea for a company selling affordable basics: Make clothes that appeal to a customer's values. Rare among its fashion-industry peers, Everlane has pulled back the curtain on all aspects of its business, telling shoppers everything about the clothes it sells: from where the yarn is shorn to how

much labor and shipping costs to details on the working conditions in each factory. It has even developed a framework for rating and auditing its factories, with a plan to publish the results on its site in the future. At the same time, by designing stylish but durable basics that transcend trends and seasonality—and simply last longer—Everlane is minimizing the water and energy consumption associated with creating clothes.

This departure from fast fashion's opaque sourcing is part of Everlane's larger mission. "There's innovation

in technology and innovation in ideas," CEO Michael Preysman says. "We're an ideas company. It's, 'Let's be honest and completely transparent about what we do and let the customer make the decision for themselves.'" This message is increasingly appealing to modern shoppers. In 2015, just four years after opening its online shop with one \$15 T-shirt (now a cult favorite), Everlane has expanded its collection from T-shirts to include pants, sweaters, shoes, and outerwear. It now has more than 300,000 custom-

ers and last November caused an Internet frenzy when it released its first winter jackets—a pair of wool coats starting at \$250—to a 2,000-person waiting list. Perhaps more remarkable is that Preysman and company have accomplished all this without any traditional marketing. Instead Everlane relies on Instagram, Periscope, and Snapchat to attract like-minded customers. The point, says Preysman, is to "empower people with information and let them decide how to handle it."

25 ► KIT AND ACE

***For designing
luxe casual wear from
next-generation
performance fabrics***



With Kit and Ace, Shannon and J.J. Wilson, the wife and son of Lululemon founder Chip Wilson, took the idea that made Chip's athleisure creation a billion-dollar brand and turned it upside down. Rather than encouraging people to dress down in smooth-seamed yoga pants and sweat-wicking tees, they're enticing those same athleisure converts to trade up to office-ready basics. Kit and Ace offers cozy base layers

and statement-making sweaters in new technical fabrics with wash-and-wear ease and the look and feel of cashmere.

In the less than two years since its launch, the company has opened 61 stores and plans to add 70 by the end of 2016, in locations stretching from Milwaukee to Melbourne, Australia. "The irony is that we opened a lot of these stores as pop-ups just to test the marketplace, but the demand is there and

we keep seeing a return on our investments," says J.J.

Kit and Ace keeps customers coming back by cultivating a community-center feel at its stores (a strategy that helped drive Lululemon's feverish following). Outposts woo local creative professionals: Roughly one-quarter of each location is designed by area artisans, and most have a dining-room table (modeled after the Wilsons' own) for invite-only quarterly supper

Wilson, with his stepmother, Shannon, learned the apparel business at the dinner table as his dad built Lululemon.

clubs. Many stores also host emerging designers for in-shop residences where they experiment with Kit and Ace's fabrics. Some of the resulting pieces have been integrated into the collection and sold worldwide.

The company's primary aim, Shannon says, remains "creating this new category of fabric." This spring, Kit and Ace will introduce swimwear and yet another new proprietary fabric: technical silk.

26 ► SLACK

For becoming the creative home of our work lives

On the day you read this, we—and 2 million other people at companies including Zappos, Pinterest, and Samsung—are conversing in the messaging tool Slack. “Slack ends up being the one app you have open all day, every day,” says CEO Stewart Butterfield. The company delighted its rabid fans in 2015 by adding emojis, private group messages, and support for more than 150 apps. But it’s the creative ways that users deploy Slack, in and out of the office, that give it its soul.



①

Taking it home

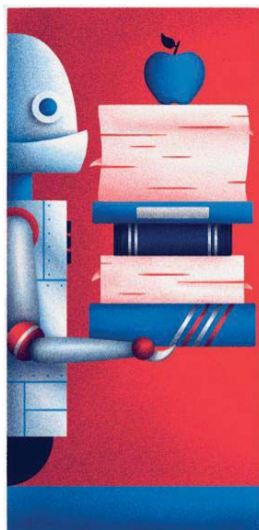
Slack is for enterprises—and made \$50 million from 570,000 paid users last year—but once you’re in it all day, why not fold in your home life, too? Users have turned to the productivity app IFTTT to forward personal texts to Slack and Kyber to create and share to-do lists with family.



②

Staying in the know

Users can employ customizable bots to route breaking news from third-party services such as Twitter and Storyful to a preferred Slack channel, which has transformed newsrooms from *The New York Times* to *Slate*. The bot Notify alerts people to companies or keywords they’re tracking online.



③

Delegating tasks

Simple text commands keep users from having to open other apps for everyday tasks. Type “/blockspring email-lookup” to find someone’s contact info or “/four-square bar near [address]” to find a lunch spot. Meekan is an AI app to schedule meetings; Birdly manages expense reports for teams.



④

Networking with pros

Public communities have popped up to help professionals find and source new job opportunities. Steamrollers connects underrepresented workers in tech, FEDs promotes front-end developers, Domino is for freelancers, and #launch helps a business creator find a cofounder.



⑤

Finding solutions

Slack has become a compelling way for like-minded strangers to connect on private channels. The Prosper community is an ad hoc collective of designers and developers who collaborate to help refugees. Psychedelic Chat connects researchers to discuss the benefits of psychotropic substances.

27 ► RETHINK ROBOTICS

For bringing precision to robotic automation

0.1 millimeters

The margin of error with which the new one-armed Sawyer robot from Rethink Robotics performs high-performance, high-precision manufacturing for companies such as GE and furniture maker Steelcase. Made for detail-oriented tasks, the 42-pound Sawyer takes just two hours to set up and requires little human oversight. Rethink already has distribution partners for Sawyer in China, Japan, and Latin America—proving the diminutive robot has global reach.

28 ► SOULCYCLE

For cultivating a nation of spinning enthusiasts

The upscale cycling studio is riding its grapefruit-scented brand of escapism beyond its core hubs of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. As it rolls toward an expected 2016 IPO, SoulCycle is boasting a 23% profit margin—and quickly expanding its studio footprint. In 2015, it moved into Miami and Chicago and went from 37 to 55 studios, with plans to add another 10 to 15 every year until it has 250 U.S. sweat shops. Before it enters new cities, SoulCycle assesses demand via social media and pop-up events like its 10-city winter 2016 partnership with Target. At least three to four months prior to any launch, it deploys studio teams, instructors, and marketers to create awareness and excitement among local influencers and businesses. “Bringing joy to fitness,” says CEO Melanie Whelan, “and pairing it with inspirational coaching and great music, translates into any market and any community.”

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29 ► SIXTEEN STRING JACK

For inspiring action along with comedic outrage

Topical, even political, comedy has been a late-night staple for generations, but until *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*, produced by Oliver's company, Sixteen String Jack, it didn't make a point to routinely incite action. Oliver's signature work—intensively researched, long-form pieces that dive into under-explored issues for up to 20 minutes—often asks viewers to participate in the joke. Within hours of airing, HBO releases Oliver's entreaties online (an unusual step for a subscription network), helping them echo throughout the Internet and beyond to stimulate a national conversation—and even impact policy. Here, three topics Oliver has addressed.

①

Big Tobacco

Last February, when tobacco conglomerate Philip Morris International threatened expensive legal action against countries such as West Africa's Togo over their plans to require graphic warnings on cigarette packages (in the place of company branding), Oliver proposed a compromise: a new Marlboro spokesperson called Jeff the Diseased Lung in a Cowboy Hat. He urged fans to weigh in on PMI's efforts with the hashtag #JeffWeCan and to tag Jeff's photo on Google Plus with "Marlboro." Nearly a year

later, Jeff remains at the top of the list of returns for a Google image search of "Marlboro Man."

②

Tax law

To spotlight tax exemptions for televangelist-led megachurches that manipulate worshippers into donating "seed" money, Oliver legally established his own cash-grab church, Our Lady of Perpetual Exemption. Declaring himself Mega-Reverend John Oliver, he called on viewers for donations. They sent in tens of thousands of dollars, which the show

forwarded to Doctors Without Borders before shutting down the church. The Trinity Foundation, an organization that investigates religious fraud and has pressured the IRS to rethink how it evaluates church doctrine, has since renewed its efforts.

③

Poultry industry

In May, Oliver called out Congress for its implicit support of big poultry processors that hold smaller farmers to stringent contracts that often keep them below the poverty line. His segment, which encouraged viewers to insert chicken-related profanities into the Wikipedia pages of hypocritical members of Congress, helped secure the passage of a bill sponsored by Rep. Marcy Kaptur to protect independent farmers. "We've never had publicity like this in the 16 years I've worked on this issue," she says.



Illustration source images, clockwise from bottom center: Jesse Dittmar/Redux (Oliver); Eric Liebowitz/HBO (lung mascot); Michael Burrell/Alamy (cigarette); F.L.P.A./Alamy (chicken); Kevork Djansazian/AP/Corbis (robes); Blend Images/Alamy (money pile); Keith Leighton/Alamy (Bible)



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For upping the ante on architectural biomimicry

SANAA's River building in New Canaan, Connecticut, embodies the architecture firm's emphasis on context and environment.





“The 20th century pursued industrial repetition and conflict with the environment. We think one of the major themes of the coming age will be an organic feel and harmony with the environment,” says architect Kazuyo Sejima, who founded the Tokyo-based firm SANAA along with partner Ryue Nishizawa. With their

new River building—an 83,000-square-foot, 1,400-foot-long structure on a nature preserve in New Canaan, Connecticut—Sejima and Nishizawa have taken this contextual approach to an elegant new level.

Composed of glass-walled pavilions joined by a continuous, snaking roof, the low-slung structure is home to the Grace Community Church

and not-for-profit Grace Farms Foundation. Serving as both a gathering space for the public and a lens through which to view the preserve’s meadows, trees, and rolling hills, it provides a model for how a building can relate to its environment. “Architecture can enter into a dialogue with its surroundings through a shape that matches the topography,

an organic feel, a sense of freedom and transparency,” Sejima says.

Sejima and Nishizawa have been pursuing these themes since opening their firm in 1995, building a body of work that is refined, harmonious, and borderline obsessive when it comes to the “right” proportions. From the playfully stacked boxes of Manhattan’s New Museum

to the undulating Rolex Learning Center in Switzerland, SANAA’s structures are subtle regardless of their scale—and have inspired others to embrace this perspective. The firm recently won the high-profile commissions for the new National Gallery and Ludwig Museum in Budapest, Hungary, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in Sydney.

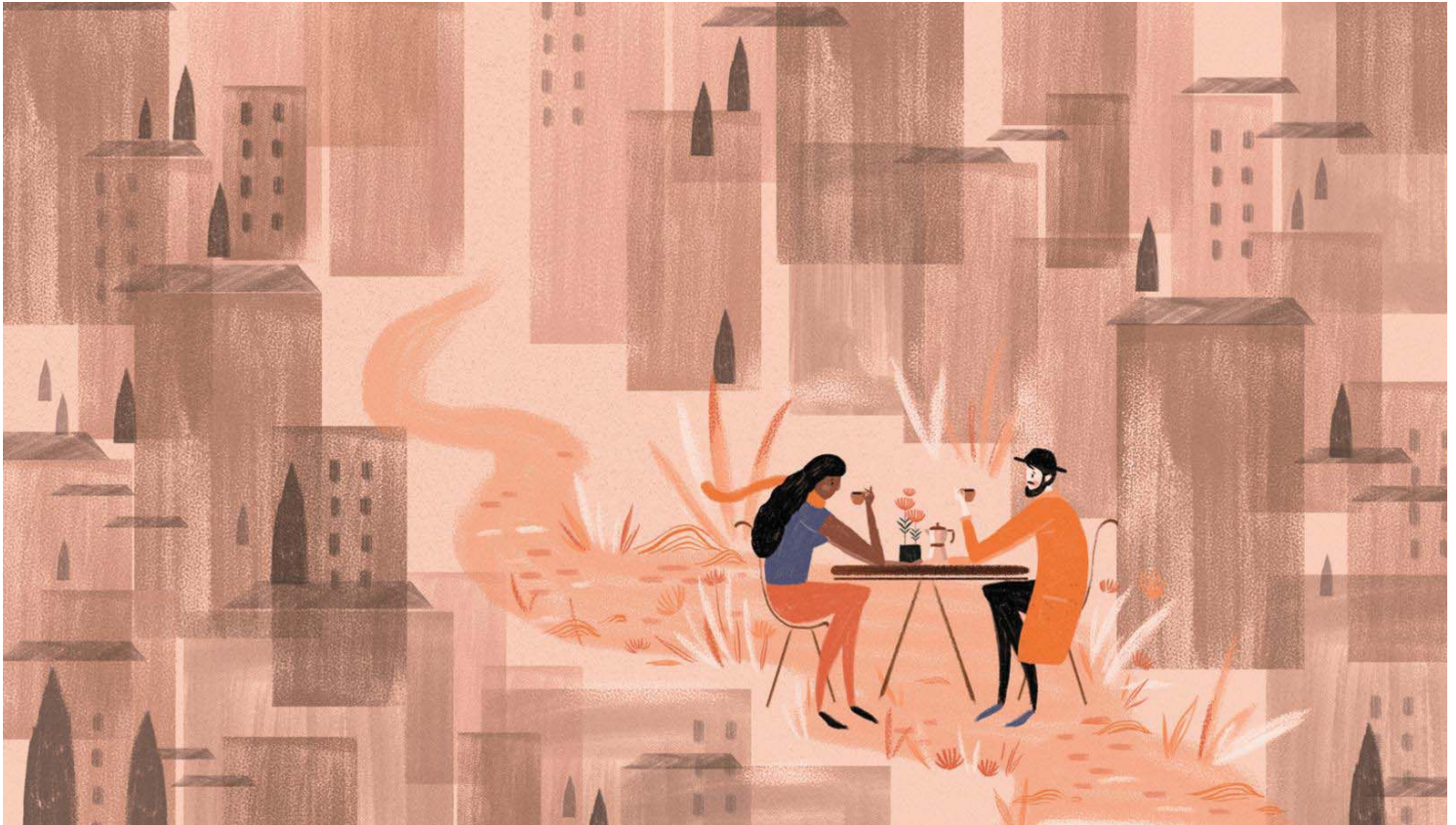


31 ► AIRBNB

32 ► GENERATOR

33 ► BEMYGUEST

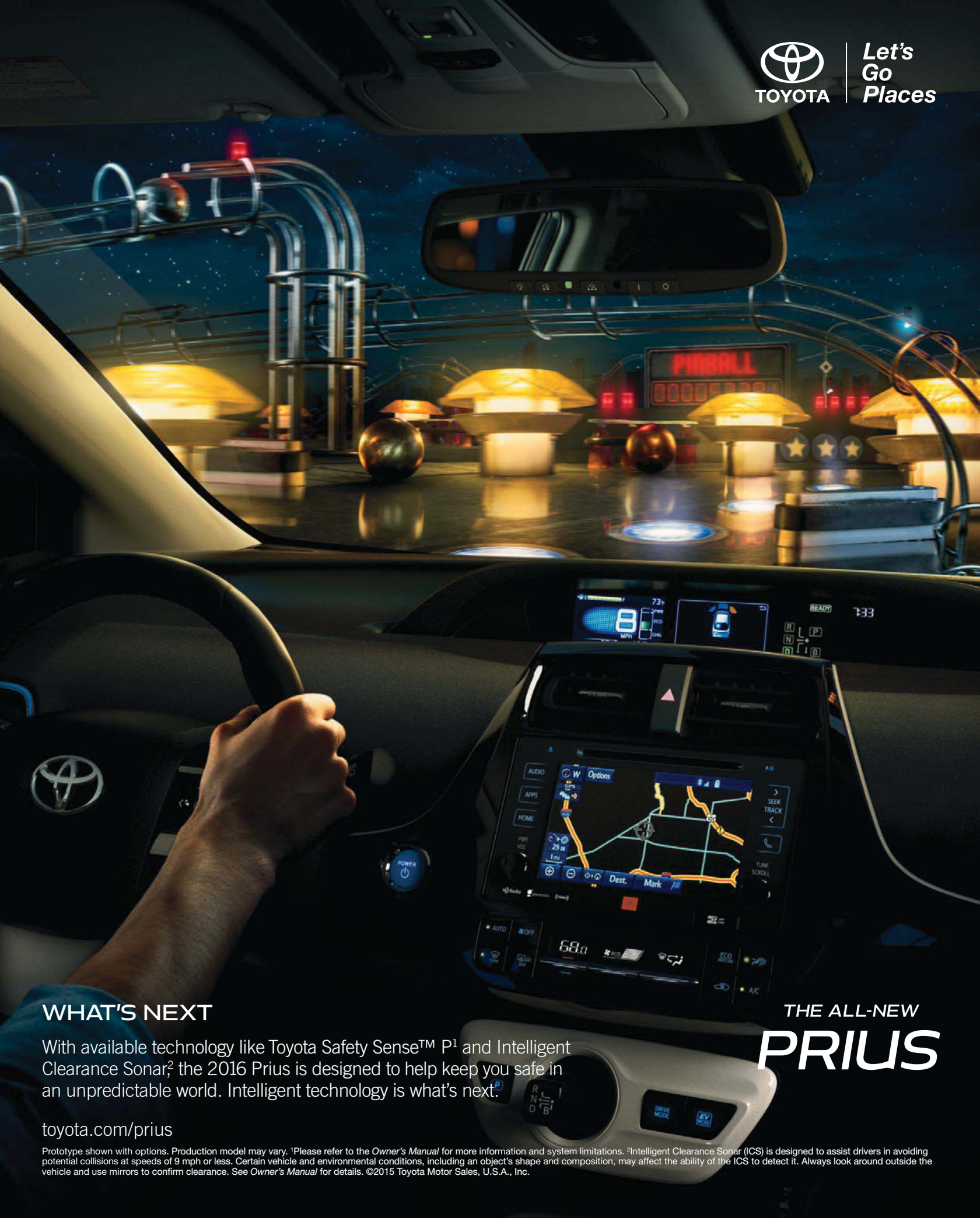
For democratizing authentic, local travel experiences



	PROBLEM	SOLUTION	SECRET WEAPON	2015 MOMENTUM	NEW ALLIES	WHAT'S NEXT
Airbnb	Travelers are getting used to sleeping in other people's beds, but many still want hotel-like services and professionalism.	Activate hosts to provide not just rooms but also city recommendations; create better digital management tools.	A dashboard that helps hosts track reservations, respond more quickly to inquiries, and set room rates.	Took in about \$900 million in 2015 revenue; introduced Business Travel Ready listings to court new segment.	Cubans! Airbnb turned to the country's <i>casa particular</i> network for an early foothold on the island.	Testing a Journeys program that allows travelers to book rooms, car service, and even guided adventures.
Generator	Budget travel in Europe often means choosing between anodyne hotel rooms and unappealing hostels.	A brand of ultra-stylish hostels with both shared and private rooms, along with hip, local in-house events.	Creative director Anwar Mekhayech, whose eclectic-sexy interior design gives the brand its heat and increasing buzz.	Opened the 920-bed Generator Paris, bringing the total to 8,600 beds across 10 hostels; took in about \$63 million in 2015.	Brand marketers, for whom adventurous millennial travelers are catnip; Uber and Urban Outfitters have already aligned.	An American invasion (Miami, Utah, L.A., and more) over the next few years; resorts are also coming.
BeMyGuest	Members of Asia's rising middle class have few resources if they want to travel independently in their own region.	An Asia-focused tours-and-activities online booking platform that connects travelers with 13,000 activities.	A first-for-the-region system that helps small tour operators manage everything from translations to inventory online.	A new integration with China's online travel colossus Ctrip has fueled an average month-over-month growth of 100%.	Travel agents—a digital platform allows them to plan itineraries drawing from BeMyGuest's tour inventory.	Partnerships with other major travel engines in India and China in 2016; support for more Asian languages.



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34 ► SOCIAL CAPITAL

For building a 21st-century change agent



With savvy investments in Box, Slack, SurveyMonkey, Wealthfront, and Second Market, Social Capital could have been content being a prosperous venture firm. Instead, according to founder and CEO Chamath Palihapitiya, it's aiming to be "a progress factory." Social Capital invests in startups, but when "industries [are] so

lumbering that they are really holding back human potential," the fund steps in and creates the solutions itself in the form of new businesses. Among the five companies Social Capital has started are Glooko, a diabetes-management service that uses data to help patients better manage the chronic ailment (Palihapitiya's dad suffered from

the disease), and Rama, a wireless carrier rolling out low-cost Wi-Fi in developing nations with an intent to disrupt the U.S. market as well. Palihapitiya and his partners try to focus on companies that they believe could, by addressing enormous societal problems, affect a quarter of the world's population, employ up to 10 million people, and

make up to \$1 trillion for investors. Their metrics for success: no less than an uptick in "the GDP and the happiness of the markets in which we operate." Social Capital's world-changing ambitions reflect the priorities of its senior investment team, which has a roughly 50-50 gender and ethnicity split—rare for a VC firm. In fact, Social Capital recently partnered with tech-news site *The Information* to publish a ranking of VC firms' diversity, which laid bare the industry's monoculture. "If you're going to be successful on a broad basis, you're going to need to appeal to different kinds of people from different kinds of backgrounds," Palihapitiya explains. "The diversity we have is frankly our only path to long-term viability. That's not to say we're going to be successful, but at minimum we're going to be more interesting than a bunch of old, white dipshits."



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For changing the game with mobile video

Junior MJ Walker of the Jonesboro Cardinals makes a ritual of watching his performance on Hudl after every game: "There's no waiting. I can see what I did wrong and what I did right."



BY MATTHEW SHAER

Photographs by Emiliano Granado



An hour before dawn on a recent winter morning, the members of the Jonesboro High School basketball squad file into a darkened classroom to watch tape from the previous night's win over Eagle's Landing. On paper, at least, the showing was impressive—the kind of come-from-behind, 14-point victory that catapulted Jonesboro, a public school in the outskirts of Atlanta, to back-to-back Georgia state titles in 2014 and 2015.

But the Jonesboro Cardinals' coach, Dan Maehlman, is having trouble finding much to praise. "Do you know what it means when I say *deny*? Am I speaking a foreign language?" he asks, gripping his head as if it's about to crater open. He gestures at the projector screen, where two defenders are failing to intercept a lob pass. Maehlman rewinds and replays the offending sequence. "Let me try this



again for you guys: *Deny* means that your *goddamn* player does not catch the *goddamn* basketball.”

The players are largely silent. Most have already spent hours watching the tape on their own, on their smartphones, tablets, and home computers, using software called Hudl. At the meeting, Maehlman, too, is using the technology. Created by two buddies from the University of Nebraska business school, Hudl is built around digital video playback: Teams upload game films (captured either on a mobile device running the Hudl app or a digital camera) to Hudl servers, where they are instantly available to anyone with viewing permissions, from training staff to players to scouts and recruiters. Later, coaches can flag sections of the video (that unprompted turnover in the fourth quarter or that particularly balletic second-quarter steal), inserting notes, scribbles, or audio commentary for their players. They can also use those clips to create digital playbooks for the team. Athletes tap the software to study plays, edit and share highlight reels on their customizable Hudl profile pages, and send their coaches clips to analyze.

Or they can review and discuss in person, as Maehlman and the Jonesboro squad are doing today. A 6-foot-6 former forward for West Virginia’s Alderson Broaddus University, the coach bears a close resemblance to an Appalachian peak—broad at the midsection, broader at the shoulders, and unforested at the summit. In Georgia high school basketball circles, he has a reputation as a brilliant strategist (he was coach of the year in 2015) and a kind of anti-cheerleader: Even when his teams are winning by many points, he tends to pace the sidelines with a look that alternates between anguish and fury.

On the morning I sit in on the Cardinals’ game review, Maehlman’s ire is trained on his team’s defense. He slides his hand over the track pad on his laptop, stopping the Hudl video at minute marker 21:23. The Cardinals’ defense is clustered around their own net. “We were doing this all night long,” Maehlman says. On the projector, the Cardinals jerk back to life. “We get the rebound, fine, but then we

decide, for some reason, that we’re going to dribble. Why?” Fast-forward. Stop. “Now here, we have the rebound again, and we make the outlet pass, but it’s slow. It’s sideways. It’s almost backwards, for God’s sake.”

At 8 a.m., with a half hour before the first bell of the school day, the team heads to the gym and straight into an outlet drill. Standing at half-court, Maehlman observes his sophomore center, Jamari Mosley, dribble off the rebound. “Jamari, did you see the same video as me?” he shouts. “Were you listening? The next player that does that and the entire *goddamn* team is going to be running wind sprints until 8:30 a.m.” On the second go-round, Mosley barely lets the ball hit the ground: jumping rebound, looping pass to his teammate, *swish*. “Okay,” Maehlman says, mostly to himself. “Better.” He sounds halfway convinced.

IF A WHITEBOARD and erasable marker were the primary tools of the trade for previous generations of coaches, Hudl is fast becoming the 21st-century analogue. More than 100,000 sports outfits around the world currently rely on the software, paying annual subscription fees from \$99 (for club teams) to as much as \$50,000 (for pros)—and more for the additional tools Hudl is starting to roll out. The service has been adopted by NFL teams and NHL squads and all but one of the 30 NBA teams. Some of the world’s most elite international organizations, including FC Barcelona, the New Zealand All Blacks national rugby team, and almost all the English Premier League clubs, have subscriptions. Hudl’s widest adoption, though, has been among college, high school, and club teams in the United States. In the basketball vertical alone, nearly 22,000 schools and colleges count Hudl as a foundational coaching tool.

Despite Hudl’s ubiquity, many observers were taken by surprise when the bootstrapped, Lincoln, Nebraska-based startup announced last spring that it had raised \$72.5 million in a single Series B investment round, giving it a \$250 million valuation. It was startling news to anyone unaware of the subtle yet transformative effect Hudl has had on the way coaches and players at all levels communicate with one another and the outside world.

“We want to capture and add value to every moment in sports,” says CEO David Graff, who founded Hudl in 2006 with fellow computer engineer John Wirtz. At Jonesboro High School, Hudl is integral to almost everything the basketball team does. The morning after nearly every game, Maehlman takes his players through his annotated reel; before big matchups, he screens films of the opposing team. In addition to the video features, the software keeps track of individual and squad stats and automatically creates graphs and colorful shot charts depicting patterns in the team’s play.

Maehlman also uses Hudl when talking to recruiters. Last year, for instance, he directed representatives from a handful of colleges to the Hudl profile pages of two of his top players, Tariq Jenkins, a senior point guard, and James “MJ” Walker Jr., a 6-foot-6 junior shooting guard who’s almost certainly bound for the NBA. The profiles included highlight clips, stats, and even test scores and grade-point averages. “By the time they got done looking at those pages, the recruiters knew everything they needed to know,” says Maehlman. “And I didn’t have to spend hours emailing back and forth with them.”

Like a lot of successful software, Hudl was conceived as a digital replacement for a task long done by hand—in this case, the exchange of the game tapes that coaches use to keep tabs on the competition. “You’d have people driving hundreds of miles to trade DVDs or waiting days for the things to come

Coach Dan Maehlman, who won back-to-back state basketball titles in 2014 and 2015, is betting on Hudl to help his team three-peat.





The morning after nearly every game, the members of the Jonesboro basketball team commandeer a high school classroom to review Hudl footage with coach Maehlman.

through the mail,” says Graff. “And once you got the tape, there was so much data and so many plays to break down and no easy way to do it. We set out to change that.”

In early 2006, Wirtz and Graff, a graduate assistant for the Nebraska athletic program, managed to get a beta version of Hudl—then known as Huddle—in front of Bill Callahan, the head coach of the nationally ranked Cornhuskers football squad. The software was pretty bare-bones: a media player, essentially. But Callahan immediately grasped the potential. If the pair could have a finished version of the product ready by the start of the 2007 football season, Callahan said he would use it.

Luckily, Wirtz and Graff had good timing: Video hardware was becoming more affordable, as was cloud storage. And the smartphone, while not yet ubiquitous, was ascendant. Together with a small team of designers and user-interface experts, Wirtz and Graff refined their software, building in the crucial ability to capture video via mobile devices and to review that tape on pocket-size screens. When Callahan landed a job as assistant coach of the New York Jets, he took Hudl with him.

The Hudl founders hoped other pro teams would quickly adopt their technology, but that didn’t happen. “We had eight months there where we were kind of beating our heads against the wall,” Graff recalls. The breakthrough, as he tells it, was Hudl’s decision to expand into high school sports. After all, the pool of pro teams is small. The high school market is almost limitless. So in 2009, after opening a pilot program at 12 schools in Nebraska, Texas, and Kansas, Hudl dropped the starting price of an annual subscription to \$800 for high schools. By 2010, it had signed 2,000 teams. The number grew from there: 7,000, 8,000, 80,000, more. And not just football, but also basketball, soccer, baseball, and volleyball.

Hudl didn’t just make coaching easier; it changed the way sports organizations operated. “Sports has been undergoing this tech revolution on so many levels, where it’s all about having an objective approach to performance measurement,” says Vince Gennaro, director of the sports management program at Columbia University. “We now have wearable technologies, high-speed cameras, Doppler radar, and data-collection devices that will measure everything from the pitch recognition of a batter in baseball to the force of impact on a tackle in football to the spin rate and spin axis of a shot on goal in a soccer match. And we’ve only scratched the surface.”

Hudl’s genius was to democratize the tech revolution Gennaro describes by bringing it to pro teams as well as high school, youth, and rec-league teams. Here were shareable, editable, accessible analytics of the kind typically reserved for moneyed pro organizations. “You’d have a conversation with one coach, and next thing you know, you’d get a call from another a county over, someone saying this is what he’s been waiting for,” recalls Jason Aldridge, a former football coach and the Hudl sales rep for Georgia and South Carolina. “It was very much filling a void for these teams.”

As it grew, Hudl snapped up smaller competitors such as DVSports and Apex Sports, expanding its market share. Acquisitions of London-based Replay Analysis and Australia’s Sportstec have helped grow Hudl’s presence among international and elite teams. And with the purchase of startups like Ubersense, a slow-motion-video-analysis company, Hudl has expanded beyond its signature subscription app. The new Hudl Technique, a free stand-alone app based on Ubersense code, lets athletes see the velocity and angles of, say, a golf swing or soccer kick, or the form of a free throw. The software, which has been used by Olympians in 20 disciplines, gives Hudl entrée into non-team sports, such as golf, tennis, snowboarding, and even CrossFit. The Hudl Combine app, the product of a new partnership with Nike, lets players upload stats from the 40-yard dash and other football combine events and share them with potential recruiters.

Officially, the company, whose headquarters house 200 employees, does not disclose annual revenue, but estimates are generally in the neighborhood of \$30 million, up from \$1.4 million in 2010. In the coming months, Hudl will release a pair of new, paid add-ons to its core subscriptions that are currently in beta. The first, Hudl Assist for basketball, takes all data entry off management’s hands—coaches submit video to Hudl, and a professional sports analyst tallies and breaks down all the statistics from the game. Later this year, Hudl will launch Sideline, a live-playback feature. Coaches can connect up to five devices to Sideline—assuming they’ve got a Wi-Fi connection at their local field—and share and annotate clips in real time. Spot a weakness on your opponent’s defensive line? You can call a time-out, bring up the relevant clip on your iPad, and point out the opening.

“The best way I can describe Hudl to you is that it’s just streamlined a whole lot of processes for us,” says Maehlman. “Need tape? It’s there. Need info on an opponent

“SPORTS HAS BEEN UNDERGOING THIS TECH REVOLUTION, WHERE IT’S ALL ABOUT HAVING AN OBJECTIVE APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT. AND WE’VE ONLY SCRATCHED THE SURFACE.”

that you might face in the semifinals of a state tournament? Or exactly how one individual player shot from the free-throw line? That’s there too. And it frees me up for what I need to be doing, which is concentrating on coaching and the team.”

IN MID-DECEMBER the Jonesboro Cardinals travel by bus to Christian Brothers High School, in East Memphis, Tennessee, for the eighth annual Memphis vs. Atlanta Roundball Classic. The two-day event will not affect the Cardinals’ progression toward the state finals. But the symbolic importance of the tournament is hard to ignore. In the summer after the 2015 championship season, the Cardinals lost several high-producing players, and the cohesion and solidarity of prior team lineups have not yet manifested themselves. Maehlman has been pushing his team hard over the past few weeks with a routine of game reviews and drills. The idea: use Hudl to show players what they need to do; use practice to get them doing it instinctively. It’s exactly what Graff envisions for his software: “Hudl is about enhancing learning opportunities.”

Jonesboro is scheduled to play two games during the Roundball Classic. The first contest is a win but a desultory one—the Cardinals left Georgia at 5 a.m., and their fatigue is obvious. The mood for the next night’s game is far livelier: The stands are full, and nearly everyone in the room is rooting for the Cardinals’ opponents, the Devils of nearby Germantown High School.

Although the Cardinals start strong, their defense soon starts to fray and the scrappier Devils take advantage. By halftime, the Cardinals are up by just two, and they struggle throughout the second half until, with four seconds left, they’re down by three.

What happens next is magic. How else to describe it? With three seconds remaining, the Devils miss a layup that would have buried the Cardinals for good. That’s when Mosley, the very player Maehlman had called out for dribbling off the rebound a few days earlier, grabs the ball—two seconds remaining—and chucks an outlet pass to Jenkins. The clock whirs down to one second. Jenkins is at half-court. Pushing off his back right heel, he reels forward and releases his grip on the ball. The buzzer rings. The ball drops through the net.

For a moment, the auditorium goes dead. The Cardinals bench surges forward to wrap Jenkins in a hug. The momentum has shifted. Now it is the Devils who are off balance. Overtime ends with the Cardinals on top by 12 points. It is a banner win, a small miracle set in motion by meticulous coaching. After the game, the Cardinals burst through the double doors of the locker room, hollering and screaming, with Maehlman charging in after them. For the first time all day, he is smiling. **PC**



The goal isn't just to notch up a win, says senior point guard Tariq Jenkins (right): "We need to play as a single machine instead of a lot of different parts."

36 ► BOX

For becoming the backbone of major businesses



1 Global reach

IBM's "size and might," as Levie puts it—almost 400,000 employees and more than \$90 billion in revenue—is invaluable for his 1,400-person company. The Big Blue partnership introduces Box to a world-wide network of potential clients. "Literally, they are selling us," he says.



2 The Apple mind-set

As Apple's user base balloons, employers are under increasing pressure to grant access to work files on iOS devices—which Box is more than happy to facilitate. Levie calls Apple one of Box's biggest growth drivers, especially as Apple introduces workplace-friendly products like the iPad Pro.



3 An unexpected ally

Though Microsoft has famously avoided collaborating with peers (and Levie used to roast the company), last year they teamed up to allow users to work on Office files within Box and create a Windows 10 app. "It's one of our deepest partnerships from a technology standpoint," Levie says.



4 Legions of salespeople

In December, Box cemented its relationship with Salesforce by integrating with the customer relationship management software. Sales reps and other clients can now pull up Box files without leaving the Salesforce interface while also tapping into Box's content management tools.



5 Enhanced security

To reel in customers who had steered clear of the cloud due to security concerns, Box worked with Amazon Web Services to create its Enterprise Key Management technology, which safeguards clients' data by giving them full control over the encryption keys to Box's servers.

After opening 2015 with an IPO, file-sharing service Box nailed down partnerships with Amazon, Apple, IBM, Microsoft, and Salesforce, helping it reach 41 million users. This strategy of aligning with tech behemoths is "necessary and fundamental," according to CEO Aaron Levie. "The only way you choose Box is if you can connect our platform to all the other key business applications and devices that you're using." Here's what Levie is getting from his new friends.

37 ► FITBIT

For taking health tracking mainstream

1

The Fitbit app's rank at the Apple App Store over Christmas 2015, signaling Fitbit devices' popularity as holiday gifts. Fitbit, whose 2015 revenue grew more than 100% over 2014, released the Charge HR and Surge bands in January 2015 and continuously improved them via software that made them more intelligent and spurred wearers to follow—and challenge—their friends. "Once you're connected, you're less likely to leave," says CEO James Park.

38 ► SNAPCHAT

For creating a vibrantly addictive alternative to traditional TV

Snapchat owes its transformation into a mobile entertainment hub—one that has deals with the NFL, MLB, Fashion Week, and every music festival you can think of—to Live Stories. The company introduced the feature, which allows users to follow stitched-together videos of live events, a little over a year ago. Since then, Live Stories has covered everything from the VMAs to Mecca during Ramadan. Up to 20 million of Snapchat's 100 million users tune in each day. This isn't just a cool element, but a major threat to the entertainment industry: More than twice as many 18- to 24-year-olds watched the first GOP debate as a Live Story as on live TV. Stories is also becoming a revenue stream for the company, as Snapchat offers attractive ad deals around these events (living up to its \$16 billion valuation). The key, says Nick Bell, Snapchat's head of content, is access: "Some of the best shots are shots that are not available to general admission." In other words, Snapchat takes you behind the velvet rope.



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For redefining what it means to be a not-for-profit business

BY SARAH KESSLER

Photographs by Chloe Aftel



“I am so sick of fundraising.”

Leila Janah, the founder and CEO of Sama Group, has just left an hour-long staff meeting about grant proposals, and she is venting as we dig into an artisanal brick-oven pizza at Farina, a restaurant in San Francisco.

Janah, 33, founded Sama in 2008 with the belief that creating work opportunities is the most effective tool for fighting poverty. Sama goes into communities that lack living-wage jobs—from the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, and Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to rural Arkansas—and trains people to do digital work, such as verifying data that makes Google’s search algorithms smarter and flagging inappropriate content posted to TripAdvisor. So far, Sama reports that it has helped approximately 51,000 people, almost 22,000 direct beneficiaries and another 29,000-plus of their income dependents. In 2015, Sama aided twice as many people as it did in 2014.

Janah, as usual, is feeling bullish about her mission, but she’s chafing at the strictures of the traditional not-for-profit model. Janah may run an antipov-erty organization, but she is also

Sama Group founder and CEO Janah brings a Silicon Valley-style mentality to poverty relief.



a Harvard-educated former management consultant who believes in the startup ethos of experimentation, iteration, and the occasional pivot. Grant proposals, by contrast, typically compel organizations like Sama to detail programs step-by-step, in advance. “It basically requires you to predict what is going to happen in the future,” Janah says.

Eradicating poverty, though, is by definition unpredictable labor. Janah’s team has to find and train people in Kenya who have never used a computer. It has to find dependable Internet access to teach clients in rural Arkansas, where bandwidth is as scarce as jobs. Some of the good assignments it finds require several weeks of unpaid training, and Sama’s clients can’t afford to go that long between paychecks.

Janah tells me that when she gets discouraged, she remembers the maxim that every human being you help is an infinite victory. In Sama’s work, its success stories are people like Kristen Logan, a former administrative assistant in economically depressed Merced, California. She lost her job after five years and wasn’t sure if she would ever find another one that would let her support three kids by herself. Logan has used the skills she learned via Sama’s training academy to find a position fielding calls for a beauty school in New York—and earns more than she did previously.

For Janah, that is hardly enough—which is why she has dedicated herself to freeing Sama from the stifling not-for-profit funding pro-

cess. This is a radical burst of independence, and Sama is already close to achieving it. Thanks to contracts with companies including Getty Images, Microsoft, and Qualcomm, Sama has generated enough income to cover the majority of its operating costs. “If we can show that not only can we provide this dramatic improvement [in Sama workers’ lives], but we can do it on a break-even basis, it’s revolutionary,” Janah says. “Let’s say you invested a dollar in 2009. The social return on that dollar will be infinite.”

Sama represents a new model for social impact: a nonprofit that is self-funding. To get closer to that goal, in October, Janah launched an affiliated for-profit business called Laxmi, a high-end cosmetics line that enlists poor African people, predominantly women, to grow, harvest, and process its ingredients in exchange for a fair wage. Her goal is to use some of Laxmi’s profits to fund Sama’s current operations as well as give her additional capital to find new ways to fight poverty. While buy-one, get-one companies like Toms and tech-



SAMA VERSUS THE SLUMS

How Leila Janah fights poverty in the world’s poorest locales

Above: On the outskirts of Nairobi, Janah caucuses with Ken Kihara, who helps train low-income youth to do digital jobs.

Right: Samasource differs from traditional outsourcing businesses by going into the most economically challenged communities, such as Mathare, a network of slums with 500,000 residents. More than half of Sama workers are female, and more than 90% are unemployed or underemployed before receiving work from Sama.



powered not-for-profits like Charity: Water have blurred the line between charities and startups, Janah wants to merge the two worlds entirely.

SAMA, WHICH MEANS "EQUAL" in Sanskrit, has had Silicon Valley DNA since its inception. Janah started the company in a Facebook-backed startup accelerator alongside ride-sharing service Lyft. Shervin Pishevar, an early investor in Uber, and Dave Morin, then a Facebook employee who would later become a noted angel investor, were among the program's first funders.

Janah partnered with an outsourcing center in Kenya to create jobs for the poor. Sama supplied it with work from tech companies—with the requirement that tasks be completed by people who, prior to hiring, were making below a living wage. To help maintain quality, Sama developed proprietary software that breaks this digital work into bite-size tasks. Last year, it took a step away from this partnership model altogether and opened its own work center near the Mathare slums in Nairobi.

To address poverty in the United States, Janah introduced a school to teach Americans how to find virtual work. The initial plan was for students to secure gigs through freelance labor marketplaces such as Upwork. But while some students found success, they faced steep international competition

from low-wage laborers. To improve job placement, Sama shifted to focus on specific skills like social media marketing. Sama's program directors in Merced, California, and Dumas, Arkansas, two of the locations where it operates, secured at least one virtual internship for each student. By the end of its second year of operation, about 50% of attendees succeeded in winning at least one online contract, and in August, Sama launched an online course to reach more people. It has since expanded the program to Nairobi.

Janah hasn't been shy about promoting her mission. "Some people don't like [it]," she admits when I ask her about complaints regarding her Instagram selfies with Richard Branson and her frequent presence on the conference circuit. "But all of our biggest deals come from pounding that kind of pavement." She counts the likes of Eventbrite cofounder Julia Hartz and Uber CEO Travis Kalanick as friends, and she aggressively converts those relationships into professional opportunities. She recently won a deal with Uber to create a custom curriculum it could offer potential drivers.

At Google Zeitgeist in October 2015 (the search company's own version of TED), Janah met Thumbtack cofounder Jonathan Swanson; a couple of weeks later she visits his headquarters to find a way to work together. Thumbtack is a startup valued at \$1.3 billion that uses a smartphone app to connect customers with plumbers, home cleaners, and other independent professionals in their area. In 2015, the company claims that 200,000 of those pros fielded 6 million project requests and generated nearly \$1 billion in revenue. "In New York City, we are training 1,000 people," Janah tells Swanson, citing a new deal Sama made to teach courses there in 2016 thanks to a grant from the Robin Hood Foundation. "If we had people (*Continued on page 114*)



Left: Sama workers (average tenure: six to 12 months) continue to improve their earning power even after they leave, and that has a profound ripple effect on their children, letting them feed their kids nutritious food, send them to a decent school, and save enough money to move out of the slums.

Below: A computer-literacy session for people who will soon perform digital work for the likes of Getty Images, Microsoft, and Qualcomm.



40 ► MIDROLL MEDIA

For transforming podcasting from passion to phenomenon



No company is more responsible for advancing the business of podcasting than Midroll. In addition to producing and distributing pop-culture shows and cutting-edge audio miniseries, Midroll has created the preeminent advertising network for the podcast industry. It has brought A-list brand marketers, such as Dunkin' Donuts and Prudential, to the medium for the first time and is even experimenting with native podcasts. "We take away the business headaches for podcasters," says Midroll CEO Adam Sachs. As a result, Midroll is helping everyone from star sportswriter Bill Simmons to the pop-culture duo Kid Fury and Crissle from *The Read* do it for more than just the love of the form. Here, Kid Fury and Crissle weigh in on what this new interest from advertisers means for the medium.

CRISSE: We've been fortunate to have the numbers necessary to get enough interest in advertising. And the show has a wide enough appeal that we can kind of pick and choose what we would like to advertise.

KID FURY: I feel like a lot of people are starting podcasts because they see that it can be lucrative. But there's this misunderstanding that they're going to push shit and the money is gonna come in. And it doesn't work that way.

CRISSE: You can almost always tell the difference between somebody who is doing a podcast because they care about the content and somebody who's doing it because they think they're going to get paid.

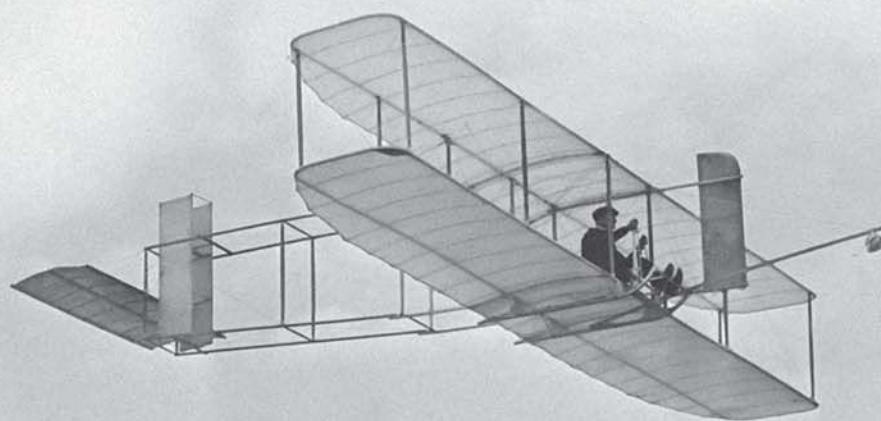
KID FURY: At the end of the day, I know that regardless of whether there's a microphone in the room or whatever, I'm just going to go talk to my friend and I'm gonna go home—and would do that anyway. So I might as well do it and get some money.





In the three years since Kid Fury (far left) and Crissle started their weekly podcast, *The Read*, they have turned their shade-filled rants into an op-ed art form.

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Vail Resorts CEO Katz uses the company's RFID-enabled ski passes to "understand who our skiers are when they come to the mountain."

44 ► VAIL RESORTS

For creating the ultimate travel loyalty program





Sometimes the mountain does come to you. When Vail Resorts chairman and CEO Rob Katz acquired Perisher, Australia's largest mountain resort, last summer, it illuminated his strategy to transform the company into the first global ski brand. The international expansion augments Vail's growing collection of 11 U.S. resorts, which extend beyond the Rockies to pint-size ski areas outside Minneapolis, Detroit, and, now, Chicago. The network allows

Vail to hedge against low snowfalls and off-season slumps, but, more important, it reaches skiers in their home markets. The satellite resorts feed customers into Vail's premier properties, including its newly merged Park City and Canyons ski area in Utah, now the largest resort in the country. Sheer size, though, is not the goal. "We aren't focused on the number of ski resorts we're buying," says Katz. "We're focused on the power of this collection."

Vail's Epic Pass—a low-priced, RFID-enabled season ticket—is the key to unlocking that power. While day-of lift tickets can cost well over \$100, the 2015–2016 pass started at just \$769 and offers unlimited access to all of Vail's resorts. It's a compelling inducement to make multiple ski trips, especially for Australians, who now use it year-round in both Southern and Northern hemispheres. The pass doubles as an on-mountain digital wallet and provides Vail

with insight into where and when its customers ski and what they buy—information that the company mines to personalize its marketing and improve the guest experience. The company continues to add features, such as lift-line wait-time estimates and free on-mountain portraits via a proprietary app. "The pass is a magnet for new skiers," says Katz. Last season, Vail sold 400,000 Epic Passes, generating \$200 million, one-seventh of its \$1.4 billion in revenue.

For improving the lives of surgery patients in India



How do you produce better results for people undergoing major surgery in chaotic, overtaxed hospitals? According to the not-for-profit Noora Health, you do it by teaching family members to assist in their relatives' care. Noora began as a graduate project in Stanford d.School's Design for Extreme Affordability class. Today, it works with 26 hospitals throughout India, including Narayana Health, one

of the country's largest chains, and has trained more than 45,000 people at a cost of less than one dollar per person. (It charges for-profit hospitals to subsidize its work at not-for-profit ones.)

Noora focuses on basic skills, such as wound hygiene and, for cardiac surgery patients, breathing exercises. "We address the highest-impact 10 to 15 skills," says Noora co-founder and chief design

officer Katy Ashe. "Who knows the patient and can spot the warning signs of complications better than their family?" To account for people with limited reading skills, Noora designed its program using video-based lessons and dramatic storytelling. After training, family members get privileged bedside access to their relatives and don't have to observe strict visiting hours. Studies have shown that

Noora's work reduces complications by 71%, improves customer satisfaction 33%, alleviates patient anxiety by a factor of six, and leads to sustained healthy behaviors. Noora's team is now expanding into diabetes, neonatal, and cancer care. "We exist to perpetuate our model," Ashe says. "We've demonstrated that adding family training should be part of the standard of care across the world."

Noora Health cofounders (from left) Shahed Alam, Edith Elliott, and Katy Ashe use design thinking in every aspect of their startup.

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46 ► SHYP

For eliminating the hassle from sending packages

BY HARRY MCCrackEN

Illustrations by Heads of State



A **Hulk Hogan** costume. An oxygen tank. A couple of packages of Ghirardelli chocolate. A Comcast cable box, a table lamp, and a pile of laundry.

I'm lurking in a Shyp warehouse—a powder-blue structure on an industrial stretch in San Francisco's Bayview neighborhood—surveying just a few of the items that the startup has picked up from customers today. Soon they'll be weighed, measured, and packed into custom boxes produced on the spot by a towering cardboard-cutting machine. Then each package will be handed off to a carrier such as FedEx or UPS—whatever is most economical for its particular shipping needs—for delivery, whether across town or halfway around the world.

It's a complex, labor-intensive process, but from the customer's point of view, all it demands is a few



taps on a smartphone. Anyone who wants to ship something simply snaps a photo of it with Shyp's app. Within 20 minutes (that's the goal), a courier arrives and whisks the item away. The traditional annoyances of shipping, from rustling up a suitable box to surviving the line at the post office, are eliminated. Hence Shyp's tagline: "We'll take it from here." The pickup price? A mere \$5.

Shyp has been described, inevitably, as "Uber for packages." As with many other so-called on-demand startups, a lot of unseen innovation goes into the simple-seeming service. And in the shipping industry, it's tough to think of a truly disruptive entrant since 1973, when FedEx (né Federal Express) introduced the mind-blowing concept of overnight delivery.

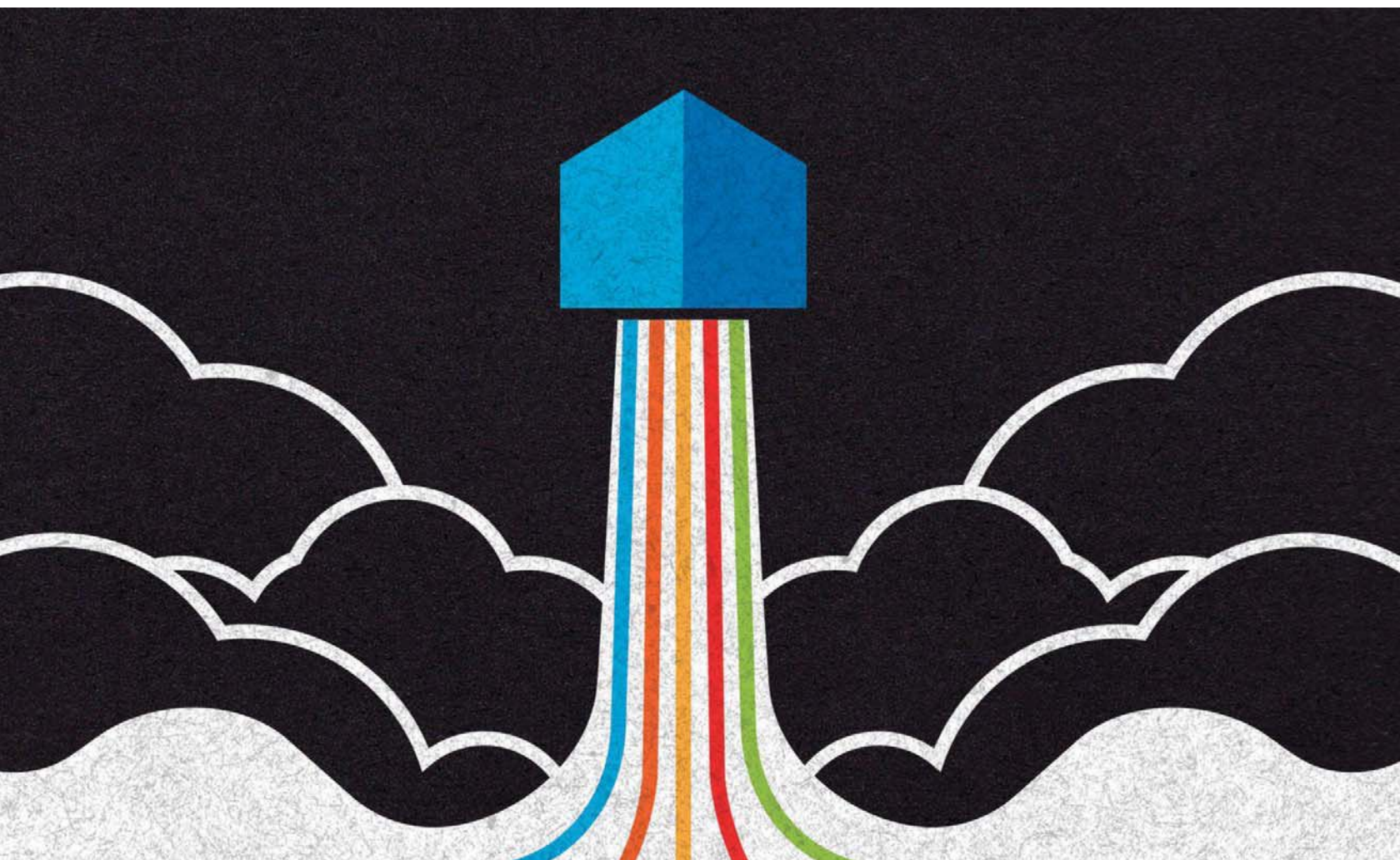
Shyp is not FedEx yet—it has just 245 employees and is available in four cities—but the company is beginning to blow some minds. As one iPhone App Store reviewer exulted, "It rewires your thinking." Largely on the strength of word of mouth, Shyp is growing by 20% month over month, has partnered with the likes of Amazon and eBay, and now handles 600% more shipments than a year ago.

Over the course of 2015, I kept close tabs on the company as it explored fresh ideas, developed a new labor model for its workers (Shyp is one of the first on-demand companies to move away from relying on contractors), and honed a model that makes this novel consumer

action feel second nature. "We're here for a much bigger vision than just being a startup in San Francisco," says Shyp CEO and cofounder Kevin Gibbon, a spiky-haired 31-year-old whose low-key manner doesn't instantly suggest that he's out to change the world.

THE IDEA BEHIND SHYP dates back to 2002, when Gibbon was a Vancouver high school student selling items on eBay. At the time, mixed martial arts fans were willing to pay up to \$150 for shirts from clothing maker Affliction. When Gibbon found a supplier offering them at cut-rate prices, they became one of his main product lines. "I was able to make a lot of money," he recalls. "That's all this business was, arbitrage." There was only one thing about the enterprise he found irksome: shipping stuff out.

After college, Gibbon did everything from develop software for Boeing to create ShopAround, an iPhone app that helped people find deals at local retailers. He moved to San Francisco, and while



brainstorming over breakfast with his friend Joshua Scott, he brought up his simmering dislike of shipping. The two decided to turn it into a company—which, in true startup fashion, they initially operated out of a garage found on Airbnb.

Like Gibbon's eBay business, the Shyp vision was based, in part, on arbitrage. As a volume shipper, it could negotiate deep discounts from major carriers, allowing it to pocket the difference between the fees it pays and the prices it charges consumers. But to make it work, the company would also have to establish a network of couriers and trucks. It would need warehouses where goods could be packed. And it would have to write plenty of software—for consumers, couriers, and packers—to assure that the whole process happened efficiently.

Still, the potential was enormous. Shyp “solves an issue that’s as big as the problem eBay solved when it made it easy to sell things on the Internet or the problem PayPal solved when it made online payment processing accessible to the masses,” says Scott. “It saves people time and money, it allows businesses to sell more, it opens up new markets to shipping carriers.”

Gibbon and Scott (who left the company on friendly terms in early 2015) had a rudimentary version of Shyp up and running by July 2013. Available in a single San Francisco zip code, its infrastructure consisted of a Google spreadsheet, which customers could use to enter the particulars of a shipment, and Zipcars, which the founders—neither of whom owned a car—rented to make pickups. Angel investors such as Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week*, saw enough promise to put up \$2.1 million—sufficient to start the hiring that would turn Shyp into a real business.

One thing Shyp's game plan didn't involve was staffing up with people who knew a lot about shipping. “It allows you to be naive,” Gibbon explains. If you were to [hire] someone who has 20 years in this industry, it's like, ‘You can't do this, this, this, and this.’ For us, it's, ‘Why can't you?’”

Dan Rummel, who once cofounded a service to help politicians engage with voters, was smitten with Gibbon's scrappy, obsessive dedication to eradicating the drudgery of shipping and came aboard as CTO. Gibbon, Rummel says, is the kind of guy whose dinner conversation involves such scintillating topics as the \$6 billion that the U.S. Postal Service plans to spend replacing its rickety fleet of trucks. “It's just like, ‘Kevin, how do you know all these little details about this?’” Rummel says. Rummel's former colleague Wes Donohoe joined as well, as Shyp's head of product. “People come here because they want to solve this,” Donohoe says. “They have these crazy aspirations.”

Then there are the couriers, such as cyclist Juanita Usquiano, who discovered Shyp when she happened to bring food to its

headquarters while working for a meal-delivery startup. The wiry young woman, dressed in a Shyp shirt and bike shorts, tells me that she does what she does mostly because pedaling around San Francisco is “incredibly cathartic” and “you just completely familiarize yourself with the city.” But she too sees a bigger picture. “The main priority is customer experience. When everyone shares that motivation, it just makes it all the more fun.”

Shyp extended its service to New York and Miami in 2014 and Los Angeles and Chicago in 2015. (It left Miami, which proved to be a weak market, in early 2016.) Still, its immediate goals are less about expansion than nailing the logistics it's in the process of inventing. “For every city that we launch in, we learn something new, and we're able to add that to future city launches,” Gibbon says. For instance, when Gibbon and his team noticed that customers were engaging Shyp to send products back to e-commerce companies, they introduced Shyp Returns, a feature that expedites the process for Amazon, Target, Bonobos, and other major merchants.

Shyp has been able to move at a thoughtful cadence because it's impressively well-funded. In April 2015, the company announced a \$50 million round of investment led by venture-capital giant Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, bringing legendary investor John Doerr onto its board. Doerr says that Shyp's focus on pickup makes it different from the countless startups trying to reinvent the delivery of food and other goods. “It's the leader in reimagining the first mile, not the last mile,” Doerr says. “Shyp is the first to make it effortless and friction-free to ship your goods, in a way that's almost magical.”


No part of that magic is more crucial than the couriers who pick up items from customers. Shyp's gutsiest move of 2015 was its decision, announced in July, to bring them on board as salaried employees—complete with benefits such as health coverage—rather than continuing to treat them as independent contractors. (Drivers use their own vehicles; the company pays them a mileage fee to cover fuel and other costs.) The switch allows the company to sidestep the controversy that has dogged Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, and other startups dependent upon vast numbers of contractors and helps it get ahead of any legislation that could make it harder to use them.

The primary motivation, though, is to “build a company that is a great place to work for all of our couriers, all of our warehouse employees, all of our drivers,” says VP of operations James Queen, who came to Shyp by way of Spotify and once worked for producer Scott Rudin on movies such as *No Country for Old Men*. “If you think about culture and you think about companies that have grown really fast, that's something that is the hardest thing to maintain.”

Couriers now get copious amounts of formal training—forbidden by law for contractors—and are part of a real team, in sharp contrast to services such as Uber, whose pitch to prospective contractors stresses that they'll be their own bosses. “When we switched over, it was like the curtain was lifted up,” says Octavio Genera, a musician and former substitute teacher who drives for Shyp. “I've seen the whole process, which, to me, adds to the service.”

Gibbon tells me that he's less concerned with the extra expense than the opportunity to improve the service and thereby increase the volume of pickups. “If someone has a better experience, they're much more likely to tell someone else about it.”

FOR THE FIRST TIME, the company is also investing serious money in marketing. A New York City campaign plastering buildings and subways with ads began last November. In a step toward catering to merchants, Shyp announced in December a partnership with eBay, which will let sellers easily request Shyp pickups, with the \$5 fee waived. Adding more tools for businesses that might want to ship 50 or 100 items at a pop is high on the company's to-do list for 2016. Another recent move focuses on recipients: With “address-free shipping,” you can create a unique handle—such as @sparky—and associate it with your own mailing address. Friends who want to send you something can use this handle rather than memorizing your street number and zip code. And if you move, you can simply update your address and keep the same handle.

The bigger Shyp dream is rethinking the entire shipping journey, not just the first and last miles—even if it means competing with the carriers whose volume discounts make its current business model viable. After all, Shyp's mission statement is to be “the new global standard in shipping.” Says Gibbon, “We absolutely want to start chipping away at a lot of the other pieces in this entire process that we can improve.” 

“FOR EVERY CITY THAT WE LAUNCH IN, WE LEARN SOMETHING NEW, AND WE’RE ABLE TO ADD THAT TO FUTURE CITY LAUNCHES,” SAYS CEO GIBBON.

47 ► SHOPIFY

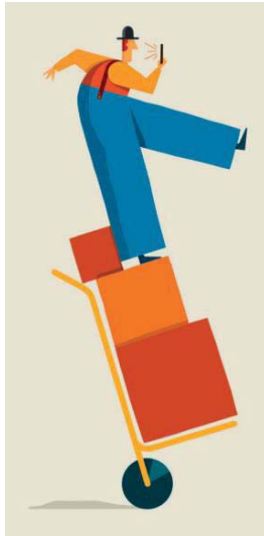
For enabling businesses to pursue retail everywhere

Shopify, which started humbly as a way for its founders to sell snowboards, now sells e-commerce tools to more than 200,000 stores and was expected to generate almost \$200 million in 2015 revenue. It's growing at approximately 100% annually and nearing profitability. Why? Because it helps merchants go wherever people might want to buy. "Businesses half a year old can sell across five different channels," says CEO Tobias Lütke. Here's how Shopify supports them.



1 Social sales

Shopify has been instrumental in bringing "Buy" buttons to social media, inking deals with Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest to create opportunities for its users where they hang out. Shopify clients using Pinterest Buyable Pins have doubled their conversion rate compared with other pins.



2 Virtual management

Shopify's app gives clients full control over their stores, including the ability to track inventory and fill orders. With a new app called Sello, anyone can create a product listing and share it on social media. "It's a free product that's essentially an on-ramp into Shopify," Lütke says.



3 Payments, simplified

Though vendors can choose from a number of payment options (including Stripe and PayPal), the company's own Shopify Payments processing service makes it easy for sellers to track returns and balances from a merchant dashboard. The company credits it with fueling its revenue growth.



4 Amazon integration

Amazon Marketplace has effectively been a competitor, but when Amazon shuttered Webstore, its own e-commerce software, Shopify made a deal to transfer its rival's merchants onto its platform—while still offering them the benefits of an Amazon listing, including fulfillment and payments.



5 Full-circle support

Shopify's point-of-sale system syncs online and offline purchases and provides end-to-end support for retailers. In 2015, the company made the system free for Shopify merchants through an iOS app and introduced a card reader that accepts chip cards and contactless transactions.

48 ► BABBEL

For helping anyone hablar como un local

1 million

Number of current, active, paying subscribers of Babel's language-learning apps in 2015. Just as important, says founder Thomas Holl, is how long these users stick around. People like the interactive courses so much that they pay the monthly fee for more than a year. Babel tailors its 8,500 hours of instruction across 14 languages according to the specific quirks and peculiarities of each of the seven native tongues it supports—making it both effective and global.

49 ► JAUNT

For becoming the first VR media company

As Sony and Oculus ready their virtual-reality headsets for the masses, one thing is clear: Early adopters will be angling for immersive content to feed into their devices. Palo Alto-based startup Jaunt has anticipated this demand, becoming a full-service shop for artists and brands seeking to crack the nongaming VR scene. Last summer, as part of what founder and CEO Jens Christensen calls its "professional pipeline," Jaunt debuted an exclusive, high-performance 360-degree camera, which is able to film in low light and capture high-speed images and multidirectional sound. It also opened a studio in L.A. helmed by the former CTO of Lucasfilm. Jaunt has produced films for ABC News, the North Face, and Paul McCartney and counts both Disney and CAA-backed Evolution Media Partners among its investors. "There will be people who want to see high-quality, professionally produced content," says Christensen. "That's where we want them to think of Jaunt."

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

WIDEN YOUR
WORLD

TURKISH
AIRLINES



NOW FLYING TO GOTHAM CITY

BATMAN v SUPERMAN
DAWN OF JUSTICE

ONLY IN CINEMAS

#FLYTOGOTHAM

BATMAN v SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE and all related characters and elements © & ™ DC Comics and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

For mastering the modern art of corporate storytelling





Nearly a decade after Hasbro turned the Transformers into a blockbuster live-action film franchise, the \$4.3 billion, 93-year-old Rhode Island company has emerged as one of Hollywood's most prolific and forward-thinking producers of film, TV, and gaming content. Hasbro's special talent—or cutie mark, if you're a My Little Pony

fan—is knowing that “this is not just about selling toys,” as chief content officer and EVP Stephen Davis explains. “That’s an important part of the brand blueprint, but it really starts with great stories and great characters that get [customers] engaged.”

Hasbro's strategy has been particularly effective in its stewardship of My Little Pony. When the company saw that girls were

interested in the characters well past the intended age of 5, it developed a new series with stories aimed at older children. The discovery that parents (and even boys, aka bronies) were also into the ponies gave Davis permission to license everything from \$4.99 Pinkie Pie figurines at Toys “R” Us to \$700 Rainbow Dash couture tops in boutiques. Both items are best sellers. “We

view licensing much like we view storytelling,” he says. “It’s a platform from which we can tell different kinds of stories to different kinds of consumers.”

Hasbro is now accelerating its Hollywood ambitions. The company has partnered with Lionsgate and Warner Bros. to make movies from its Monopoly and Dungeons & Dragons properties, while Hasbro set up its own film label,

Allspark Pictures, to nurture less-known properties, such as Jem and the Holograms. (The live-action *Jem* movie flopped at the box office but looks to have a long life in video on demand and in product tie-ins with such brands as Sephora.) The goal: to find the next Transformers in Hasbro's archive of 1,500 brands. Says Davis, “There are so many more character stories to tell.”



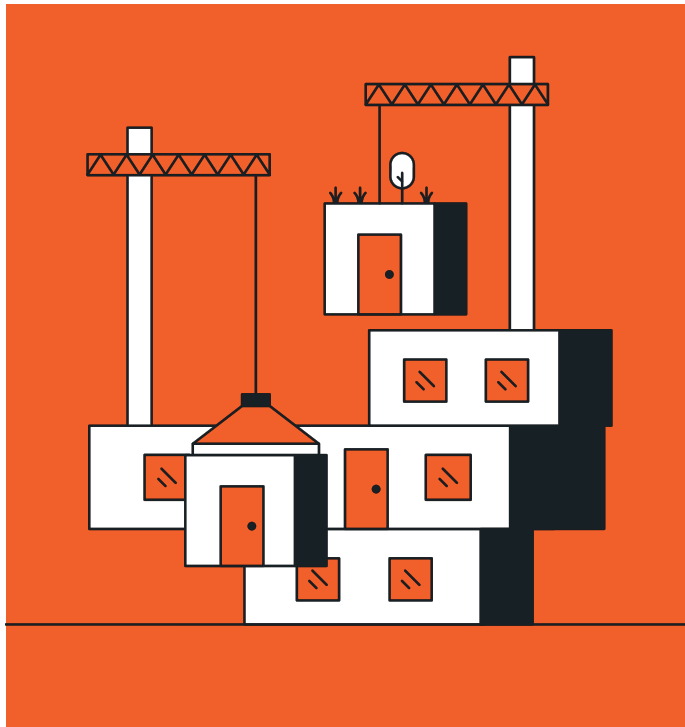
Most Innovative Companies by sector

Whether it's social media, space, sports, or style, here are the 10 fastest companies in the business world's most vibrant categories. Visit fastcompany.com/mic for more industries and details.

► ARCHITECTURE

Structural design increasingly requires modularity and adaptability: The most compelling new buildings interact with their surroundings. OMA's Timmerhuis city hall in Rotterdam, Netherlands, resembles stacked blocks—a nice visual effect that also allows units to be added or removed over time. Archiblox's modular sustainable homes maximize sunlight. Other nature nurturers include SANAA's Grace Farms River Building and Ingenhoven's "Green Heart" high-rise, which will put a giant mountain amid Singapore's bustle.

1. **SANAA**
2. **OMA**
3. **Archiblox**
4. **Tengbom**
5. **Ingenhoven Architects**
6. **Assemble**
7. **Gerber Architekten**
8. **Kasita**
9. **Ateliers Jean Nouvel**
10. **Lake|Flato**



► AUTOMOTIVE

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Hyundai
For augmenting autos with gesture-controlled heads-up displays | and making your car come to you | 6. Local Motors
For 3-D printing a car we can actually drive |
| 2. Ford
For embracing e-bikes and ride sharing | 4. Quanergy
For developing software that makes driverless cars cheaper for the rest of us | 7. Harman
For giving each passenger a "sound zone," paving the way for peaceful road trips |
| 3. Tesla Motors
For adding autopilot features overnight | 5. Sober Steering
For breathing a better breathalyzer into being | 8. Hudway
For creating the only |

- | |
|---|
| app that keeps drivers' eyes on the road |
| 9. Getaround
For turning car owners into car loaners |
| 10. Evenflo
For building a car seat that alerts parents if a baby gets too hot or her seat belt unbuckles |

► BIOTECH

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Novocure
For attacking tumors with electricity | 6. Corgenix Medical
For speeding up the Ebola test |
| 2. Bristol-Myers Squibb
For treating tumors with T cells | 7. OPM
For designing a better spine implant |
| 3. Amgen
For making cancer therapy go viral | 8. Proteus Digital Health
For digitizing Abilify |
| 4. Emerald Therapeutics
For building a testing lab in the cloud | 9. 23andMe
For reinventing itself to get FDA approval |
| 5. Enteromedics
For disrupting the signals between the brain and stomach to fight obesity | 10. Apprecia Pharmaceuticals
For creating the first 3-D-printed drug |

► CHINA

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Apple
For making China 25% of its massive business | 6. LeTV
For building a connected bicycle |
| 2. Huawei
For home brewing its high-end handsets | 7. Light Chaser
For becoming the Pixar of the East |
| 3. Tencent
For programming WeChat with HBO and the NBA | 8. Wenzhou Minshang Bank
For letting Chinese citizens borrow privately |
| 4. Didi Kuaidi
For forcing Uber to eat its dust | 9. NIU
For turning scooters green—and cool |
| 5. CRMI
For envisioning an artificial cornea for patients | 10. Lao Feng Xiang
For going global amid a luxury crackdown |

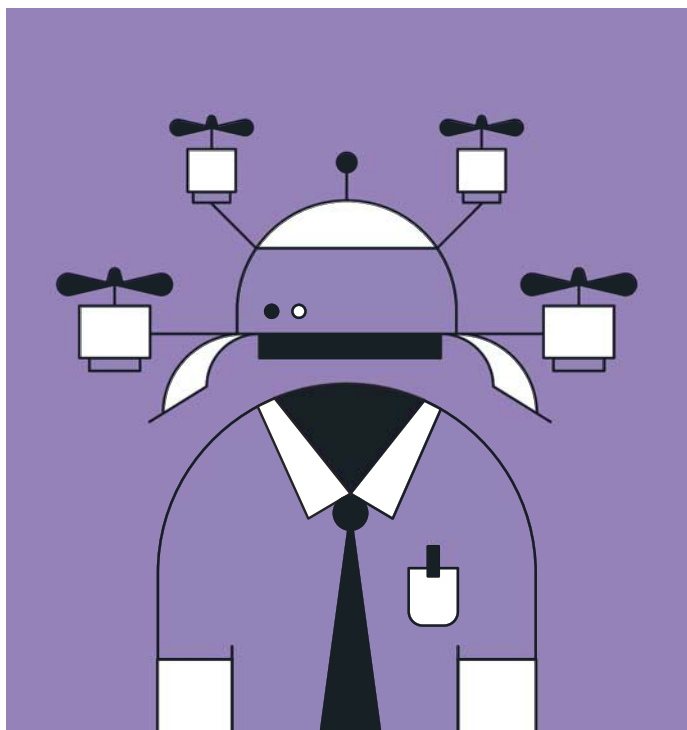
► DATA SCIENCE

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Spotify
For finding the beat in the data | 6. D2L
For personalizing the learning experience |
| 2. IBM
For taking on weather forecasting | 7. Costco
For saving water—and money |
| 3. Digital Reasoning
For stopping Wall Street rule breaking before it happens | 8. Google
For making its apps machine smart |
| 4. Mount Sinai
For creating a tool to predict the role of genes in immunology | 9. Blue Cross Blue Shield
For learning from 106 million patients and \$350 billion in claims |
| 5. Royal Dutch Shell
For identifying smarter places to drill | 10. Adatao
For letting anyone crunch numbers like Google |

► DRONES

While consumers can't wait to race and crash the latest quadcopter—or stealth bomber, as Parrot flaunted at CES in January—drones are going to work in a wide variety of ways. Agribotix uses them to help farmers seed and monitor crops, while Nokia has been sending smartphone-armed drones to inspect cell-tower reception. Even the largest seller of consumer drones, DJI, is training 10,000 pilots to become “DJI masters.” Among its first clients: a Japanese insurance company that uses drones to assess accident sites.

1. **DJI**
2. **3D Robotics**
3. **Ehang**
4. **Skycatch**
5. **Airware**
6. **Agribotix**
7. **Parrot**
8. **Swiss Postal Services**
9. **Nokia**
10. **Flying Robot International Film Festival**



► EDUCATION

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Babbel
For helping anyone speak like a local2. Wisecrack
For proving that learning can be f*@\$ing hilarious3. Google
For taking students where the school bus can't, using virtual-reality-style journeys | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. littleBits
For making STEM learning a snap5. MIT
For shortening the path to a master's degree via online coursework | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Instructure
For moving course planning to the cloud7. Knewton
For democratizing adaptive learning8. Querium
For using AI to help students bust out their algebra homework |
|--|---|---|

► ENERGY

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Tesla Motors
For taking rechargeables to Africa2. SolaRoad
For enlisting travelers to validate its solar-panel roadways3. Toyota
For fostering the hydrogen- | <ol style="list-style-type: none">fuel-cell market's growth4. Janicki Bioenergy
For building a self-powered waste-treatment plant5. SolChip
For showing us the light with a battery that never dies | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Solar Impulse
For embarking on a solar-powered flight7. Sun Electric
For mounting solar rooftops over Singapore8. Sunfire Energy
For brewing an |
|--|---|---|

"e-diesel" from water and air

9. **Younicos**
For putting renewables on the grid
10. **Sensity Systems**
For bringing the Internet of Things to LEDs

► ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Amazon
For leveraging Web Services to fuel voice and video ambitions2. Slack
For becoming the creative home of our work lives3. Box
For building the backbone of major businesses4. Microsoft
For (finally) putting its OS on the house5. Zendesk
For predicting when customers will get angry | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. DocuSign
For forming key alliances to promote its e-signature tech7. Asana
For making project management fun (!)8. Domo
For giving firms a holistic view via 300 live data sources9. Docker
For harmonizing cloud technologies10. Anaplan
For drastically reimagining the lowly spreadsheet |
|--|---|

► FINANCE

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Robinhood
For removing the barriers to stock trading2. Affirm
For selling millennials consumer loans3. Earnest
For trying to fix the long-broken student-loan system4. Aspiration
For letting customers name their own price for mutual-fund fees5. Motif Investing
For expanding its theme-based trading | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Digit
For helping people save effortlessly7. SoFi
For upending retail banking with ease8. InVenture
For creating a more inclusive credit score9. Coinbase
For making bitcoin user-friendly10. Kuaile Shidai
For building a financial system for China's upwardly mobile college kids |
|---|--|

► FITNESS

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. SoulCycle
For cultivating a nation of spinning enthusiasts2. Fitbit
For mainstreaming health tracking3. Nike
For reaching new customers by turning the Jordan brand into a video game4. Under Armour
For cramming an entire fitness-tech ecosystem into a box5. Bandier
For fashioning an athleisure boutique | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. IHG
For creating Even Hotels for a healthy night's stay7. ClassPass
For giving health nuts more options8. Peloton
For gamifying a bike to bring spin class home9. Lark
For developing a weight-loss app that talks back10. Mio
For calculating a better metric for wearables |
|---|--|

► HOLLYWOOD

1. **Netflix**

For becoming the first global TV network

2. **Universal Studios**

For breaking box-office records with canny casting and marketing

3. **Hasbro**

For mastering the art of corporate storytelling

4. **Disney**

For awakening the world to its Force, yet again

5. **STX Entertainment**

For flipping the script on moviemaking

6. **Lifetime**

For wooing stars to

push beyond the trashy made-for-TV movie

7. **Dalian Wanda**

For securing a legendary deal to rule global blockbusters

8. **Anonymous Content**

For creating popular hits that feel like indies

9. **Array**

For sounding the call for more diverse filmmakers across the industry

10. **Duplass Brothers**

For padding out your growing list of go-to movie-night streaming picks

► INDIA

1. **InMobi**

For making mobile advertising likable

2. **Noora Health**

For addressing India's nurse shortage via family education

3. **Flipkart**

For building a portal for international brands

hungry to reach Indian consumers

4. **Mahindra**

For turning the United States into its emerging market

5. **Nextdrop**

For sending water-supply updates via text message

6. **Faasos**

For popularizing on-demand food ordering

7. **Purple Squirrel**

For schooling college students with supplementary training

8. **MapMyGenome**

For encouraging

preventive health care via genetic testing

9. **Logistimo**

For keeping recipients updated on deliveries without Internet access

10. **Awaaz**

For creating a voice-based social network for rural residents

► LIVE EVENTS

Technology doesn't have to be a real-world distraction: The coolest companies are using it to enhance their events. A music lover can find a festival on Everfest—a search engine for everything from Burning Man to book fairs—then bypass the ticket line with Eventbrite's sensor-enabled wristband. Periscope uses live mobile video to deliver backstage access to stars and create an on-demand, 24-hour smartphone news network. Meanwhile, NBC is betting on event programming that viewers have to watch when it airs, from its live sitcom *Undateable* to its musicals, like *The Wiz*.

1. **Periscope**

2. **NBC**

3. **Eventbrite**

4. **Banjo**

5. **UFC**

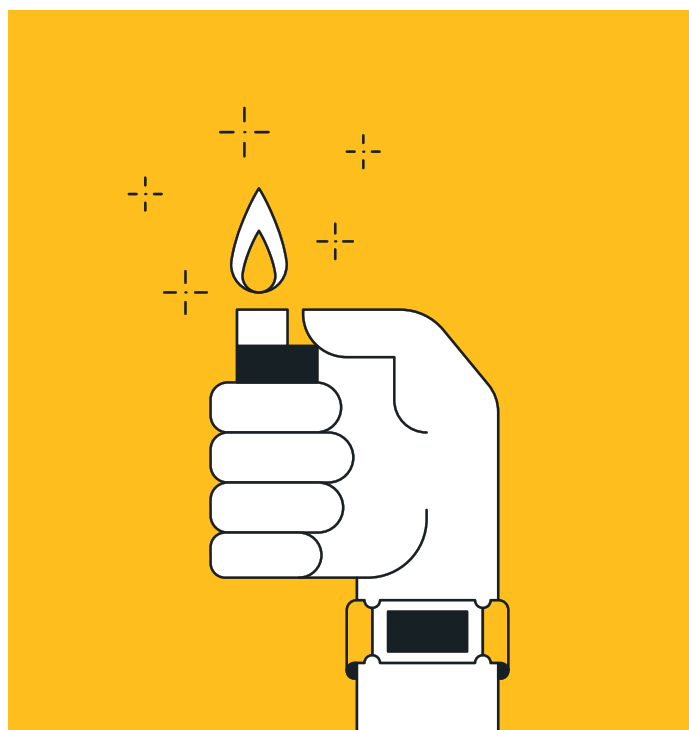
6. **Recess**

7. **Afropunk**

8. **Dinner Lab**

9. **Everfest**

10. **Pure**



► MARKETING & ADVERTISING

1. **BuzzFeed**

For teaching brands to create, not sell

2. **Midroll Media**

For connecting podcasters to premium advertisers

3. **Instagram**

For making its image feed more shoppable

4. **Under Armour**

For winning the celeb endorsement game

5. **72andSunny**

For matching up powerhouse brands

6. **GE**

For tripling its jobsite traffic with self-deprecating spots

7. **A24**

For producing ads as edgy as its films

8. **Hindustan Unilever**

For creating a phone-based radio station

9. **World Wildlife Fund**

For conjuring animal compassion via emoji

10. **Virgin America**

For showing off its sleek in-cabin experience

► MEDIA

1. **BuzzFeed**

For using data to learn how content goes viral

2. **Facebook**

For becoming a premier destination for video and news—in an instant

3. **Sixteen String Jack**

For inspiring action with comedic outrage

4. **Snapchat**

For inventing a new form with Stories

5. **Midroll Media**

For creating Howl, a Netflix for podcasts

6. **CBS**

For being the first network to go over the top

7. **Vice Media**

For transforming traditional TV online

8. **Lost My Name**

For redefining personalized publishing

9. **Wasserman Media Group**

For helping athletes reach fans

10. **Cartoon Network**

For turning its kids' app into a show lab

► MUSIC

1. **Spotify**

For remixing its streaming service

2. **OVO Sound (Drake)**

For blinging the millennial hotline by thinking meme-first

3. **Big Machine**

For advocating (Taylor) swiftly for artists' rights

4. **Sonos**

For doubling down on audio quality with its Play:5 speaker

5. **SubPac**

For feeling the music

6. **Doppler Labs**

For filtering out the noise with its smart earbuds

7. **Pandora**

For partnering with artists to sell concert tickets to big fans

8. **Shazam**

For seeing the power of image recognition

9. **Pacemaker**

For turning music lovers into pro DJs

10. **SoundCloud**

For forging tools (and licensing deals) to boost its cred as a creator's best friend

► RETAIL

In the last few years, storefronts have been under assault from e-commerce, while e-commerce startups have embraced physical retail. In the latest makeover, both sides have merged. Amazon envisions its customers ordering via its Echo voice gadget and Dash buttons, while Warby Parker, Farfetch, and Shopify are creating a seamless flow between boutique and Internet shopping. Everlane and Kit and Ace, additionally, are changing the way brands communicate with customers through radical transparency about costs and creative collaboration.

1. **CVS Health**
2. **Amazon**
3. **Warby Parker**
4. **Farfetch**
5. **Everlane**
6. **Kit and Ace**
7. **Shopify**
8. **Pinterest**
9. **Casper**
10. **Target**



► ROBOTICS

1. **Rethink Robotics**
For building a robot that can feel for parts on the assembly line
2. **Intuitive Surgical**
For deploying a multi-armed, multifunction robot for minimally invasive human surgery
3. **Grey Orange**
For automating India's e-commerce scene
4. **Insight Robotics**
For peering deeper into wildfires and structural faults
5. **Open Bionics**
For manufacturing bionic arms faster and cheaper than ever
6. **Panasonic**
For renting exoskeletons to do the heavy lifting
7. **Ethicon**
For making operating rooms almost as smart as the surgeons

8. **Anki**
For shifting its toy cars into overdrive
9. **Autodesk**
For working to make robots collaborative, rather than assistive
10. **Jibo**
For devising a friendlier personal robot

► SOCIAL GOOD

1. **Facebook**
For developing into a positive force, from Donate to Safety Check
2. **Social Capital**
For shining a light on investor diversity
3. **Aspiration**
For being a bank with the brass to donate 10% of revenue to charity
4. **Warby Parker**
For bringing glasses to American kids in need
5. **Rubicon Global**
For tapping waste-management companies to keep trash out of landfills
6. **Toms**
For giving other purpose-driven businesses a step up
7. **Classy**
For making fundraising simple and seamless for not-for-profits
8. **GoodWorld**
For enabling social media donations via hashtag

9. **Greenlight Planet**
For offering solar-powered lamps to folks living off the grid
10. **IndieGogo**
For waiving its fee for conscious campaigns

► SOCIAL MEDIA

1. **Facebook**
For incubating mega apps like Messenger and Moments
2. **BuzzFeed**
For mastering content creation for every social platform
3. **Taco Bell**
For living *más* like a digital native
4. **Periscope**
For putting a broadcast network in everyone's hands, from activists to Ellen
5. **Tumblr**
For birthing all the memes, Pepe
6. **YouNow**
For making live-streaming video personally lucrative
7. **Giphy**
For fueling the GIF craze with its searchable stockpile
8. **WeChat**
For expanding China's messaging app
9. **Tinder**
For growing its platform from swiping right to super likes
10. **Grindr**
For promoting LGBT tolerance worldwide

► SPACE

1. **SpaceX**
For launching—and landing—the first reusable space rocket
2. **Blue Origin**
For turning the new space race into a race
3. **Escape Dynamics**
For demonstrating microwaves to be the new rocket fuel
4. **Planet Labs**
For reimagining satellite imagery
5. **Electro Optic Systems**
For keeping up with space trash
6. **Planetary Resources**
For making asteroid mining a reality
7. **Arianespace**
For propelling 12 rockets in as many months
8. **Microsoft**
For bringing augmented reality to the ISS
9. **Rocket Lab**
For 3-D printing a new business model for satellites
10. **NASA**
For showing us what Pluto looks like

► SPORTS

1. **Hudl**
For changing the game with mobile video
2. **MLBAM**
For shooting the NHL into the future of streaming video
3. **Strivr Labs**
For training athletes with virtual reality
4. **Quanterix**
For detecting concussions with a single finger prick
5. **Motus**
For creating a smart sleeve to protect pitchers' arms
6. **Los Angeles Dodgers**
For incubating a crop of sports startups
7. **Zebra Technologies**
For enriching NFL player data with RFID
8. **Athos**
For outfitting athletes with gear to track muscle activity
9. **Tap.In2**
For making stadium food on demand
10. **Wilson Sporting Goods**
For developing a connected basketball

► STYLE

1. **Farfetch**

For bringing boutique-level taste to global e-commerce

2. **Balmain**

For cultivating the first social fashion house

3. **Birchbox**

For moving from samples to launching

its own sweat-proof makeup lines

4. **Louis Vuitton**

For daringly recasting the model—notably Jaden Smith for women's wear

5. **Asos**

For going on a virtual-reality shopping spree

6. **Iris Van Herpen**

For applying terraforming to runway fashion

7. **Lemaire**

For stitching together the year's hottest collaboration, with Uniqlo

8. **Outdoor Voices**

For making gym

clothes that you can wear to work

9. **Supreme**

For unleashing a stream of creative kicks—inciting pandemonium

10. **Priv**

For delivering hair and makeup appointments to users' doors

► TRAVEL

1. **Uber**

For driving into the heart of corporate America

2. **Airbnb**

For curating trips to let travelers live like locals—even in Cuba

3. **Generator**

For hippping up hosting

4. **BeMyGuest**

For bringing experiential travel to Asia

5. **Vail Resorts**

For creating the ultimate travel loyalty program

6. **OTG**

For making even Newark Airport a preflight oasis

7. **AJ Capital Partners**

For building the Graduate, a hotel brand that captures that cool college-town vibe

8. **Marriott**

For marketing its lodging empire with short films and Snapchat

9. **The Priceline Group**

For digitizing the hotel stay via Booking.com

10. **Travel Noire**

For tapping into a network of African-American globe-trotters

► VIDEO

The Cord-Cutting Era finally appears to be here, fueled by a boom in subscription streaming services. HBO and CBS each had to reimagine long-established business models to sell direct to consumers. And YouTube had to define what premium meant for its egalitarian video platform. Meanwhile, video became even more crucial for brands trying to reach the under-35 crowd on social media, which is why soccer star James Rodriguez signed his Adidas contract extension on Periscope and the James Bond filmmakers shared behind-the-scenes *Spectre* clips on Snapchat Discover.

1. **Netflix**

2. **HBO**

3. **YouTube**

4. **Periscope**

5. **Snapchat**

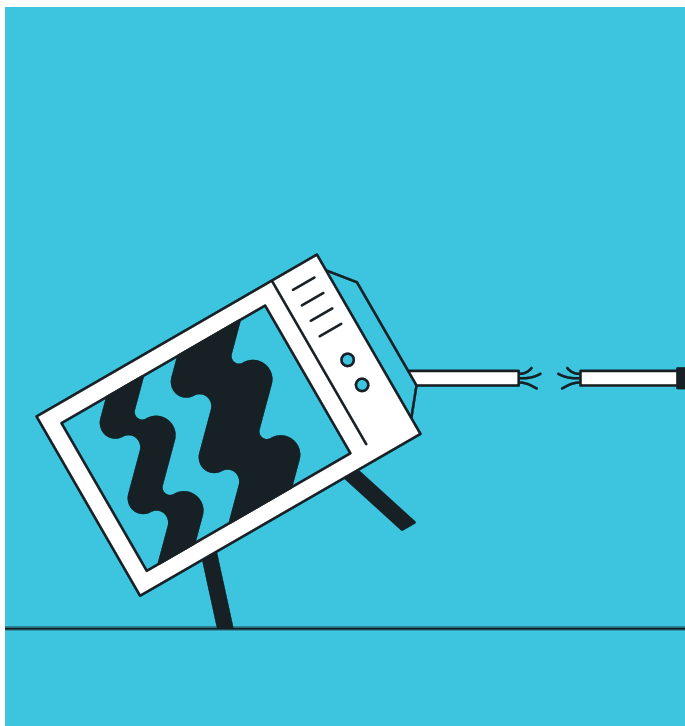
6. **Sandwich Video**

7. **Glide**

8. **CBS**

9. **Hudl**

10. **Kaltura**



► VIRTUAL REALITY

1. **Jaunt**

For building a platform, from cameras to concerts

2. **Oculus VR**

For dazzling gamers and developers with a high-end headset

3. **Google**

For putting VR for the masses in a cardboard box

4. **Microsoft**

For applying a utilitarian lens to 3-D

5. **Vrse**

For becoming the premium VR content shop for brands

6. **The New York Times**

For immersing readers in a new form of journalism

7. **NextVR**

For broadcasting big-ticket events

8. **Blippar**

For taking ads to another dimension

9. **NBA**

For ushering couch-bound fans to a courtside seat

10. **Object Theory**

For developing apps that put VR to work

How we picked the World's Most Innovative Companies

The world of innovation has become so vast and far reaching that *Fast Company* did two things differently to produce our 2016 list. One, we started earlier than ever: in March 2015. In addition, we decided to augment the ideas of our writers and editors with the power of machine intelligence. We partnered with Quid, a San Francisco-based startup whose software can read millions of news articles, blog posts, company profiles, and patents—and offer immediate

insight by organizing that content visually. A team of researchers created topographical maps of innovation across more than 40 sectors of the economy to identify the most relevant trends—along with the companies instigating or best capitalizing on them. *Fast Company* supplemented the ideas Quid surfaced with the reporting of our own team to vet them. Add a dollop of editorial judgment and—voilà!—we created the top-10 lists that appear here and at fastcompany.com.

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BuzzFeed

(Continued from page 34)

structured organization, it's hard for anyone to be creative," he says. "It's hard for people to make new things without autonomy and freedom."

Peretti's management philosophy stems from his early career as a teacher—and, he contends, from watching his younger sister Chelsea bloom into a top stand-up comedian. "The best teachers don't just say, 'I have a good way of communicating or connecting with the students.' They also change what they're communicating. They think of a new curriculum that they know the student will be excited about." As for his sister, who is now a regular on the Fox series *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and of whom he's clearly very proud: "What I learned from Chelsea and watching the way comics work is that they would tell a joke, and then the joke doesn't quite connect, so they try and tell the joke a different way."

To thrive at BuzzFeed means learning to roll with it. "BuzzFeed is this insane morphing rocket ship," Emily Fleischaker, a creative director overseeing one of the company's most popular properties, Food, tells me during a trip to her lower Manhattan test kitchen, which was previously located inside her apartment. "Every three months you have to be ready for someone to come in and be like, 'You're going to report to this person now, and your desk isn't where it used to be.'"

"And we're moving houses tomorrow," chuckles Peggy Wang, the editorial director of the Lifestyle group, who was also a student of Peretti's in the 1990s. (BuzzFeed's New York headquarters moved five blocks south in early 2016.)

"And you have to be like," Fleischaker chimes in, snapping her fingers, "All right, let's do this!"

Adaptability is a particularly useful trait in the digital media world right now. (Peretti himself relocated to L.A. in January, ostensibly because his wife prefers the West Coast, though he acknowledged in a staff email announcing the move, "BuzzFeed's second-largest and fastest-growing team is based in L.A.") As he points out, the medium is still in its infancy: In the decade since BuzzFeed was founded, our computer usage has migrated from desktop to mobile; we've shifted from browsing the web to using apps; and still images are being usurped by live video streams that include chat. Peretti's ability to frame the tech shifts that are upending content creation and consumption is why venture capitalists love him. "When he [Peretti] hangs out with us, he speaks tech natively and media with an accent," says Chris Dixon of Andreessen Horowitz, who led a \$50 million investment in BuzzFeed in 2014.

BuzzFeed is Peretti's vision, shaped by his restless curiosity. In high school, he saved his money from doing yard work to buy a Macintosh computer. He discovered the Netscape browser

as a sophomore in college, and upon graduation from the University of California, Santa Cruz, interviewed at a tech startup but decided that a \$24,000-per-year job teaching computers at a private school in New Orleans was more interesting. He landed at the MIT Media Lab, where his thesis was a software authoring tool for the classroom. Cofounding The Huffington Post in 2005 was Peretti's introduction to startups and business, but a year later, he wanted to go off and experiment again. HuffPo's investors gave him a little seed capital because "they wanted me to be able to keep doing Huffington Post," he says. "It was like, 'Oh, Jonah's doing his little R&D lab.'" He stayed on until 2011, when AOL acquired HuffPo for \$315 million. Only then did BuzzFeed become Peretti's sole focus.

Although BuzzFeed currently employs approximately 1,200 people and is valued at \$1.2 billion, Peretti still largely thinks of it as his teaching workshop. Now, as the company is reaching a size where it has to act like a real business, Peretti is finding ways to harness the chaos, just enough, to cross-pollinate ideas across departments. "A lot of what we are working on organizationally is, How do we create structures where there's lots of local autonomy plus some global coordination?"

IT'S A CRISP FALL AFTERNOON in October and Matt Stopera, a 28-year-old BuzzFeed senior editor, is discussing hoverboards—"a good, funny recent example of something where we were a little too soon," he tells me. "A couple of weeks ago, we did a post on people failing. They're falling." When I tell Stopera that I saw the piece everywhere on Twitter, he's dismissive. "In our Twitter world," meaning media and tech professionals, "everyone was talking about it, but in the real world, people aren't really talking about it."

Stopera, an Internet savant so steeped in pop culture that he appeared on an episode of MTV's *Fanography* as a teenager for his "psychotic" love of Britney Spears, is explaining how he and his 500-plus peers in the editorial department define success. They rely on an internal proprietary metric, known as "viral lift," that quantifies how much and how quickly a piece of content is shared. "If something has a 1.5 viral lift and 100,000 views and above, that was worth doing," he tells me. "It's a failure if you have 400,000 views and a 1.1 or 1.2 lift. That's a flop."

Most publishers would perceive the post with 400,000 views to be the success, but at BuzzFeed sharing is paramount. As Stopera explains, "It wasn't shared. It was all seed. The fun in the game is getting people to share something. I click on shit all the time. 'Oh, let's look at what this person posted on Instagram,' and you saw their butt cheek. It's like, click, but I'm not going to share it."

"I take no responsibility for what these insane reporters cover," says Dao Nguyen, the data maven whom Peretti named publisher in October 2014. (Editor-in-chief Ben Smith manages the journalists.) She is, however, entrusted with figuring out how articles and videos travel

across all the platforms where BuzzFeed plays. "Traditionally, publishing meant owning a printing press and dealing with delivery trucks and newsstands," says Nguyen, 42, who in fourth grade was caught debugging software code instead of doing class work (her punishment was to program a state capitals quiz for the entire class). "With digital media, getting your content to the public is all about your technical platform and your distribution plans on social networks."

As Peretti explains, "What is the competitive advantage that you can gain as a publisher today? You're not going to inherit one or get one given to you by a spectrum grant," he says, referring to the historical benefits of a family-run newspaper or a radio station. "Having technology, data science, and being able to know how to manage, optimize, and coordinate your publishing is the thing that gives you a competitive advantage."

To illustrate how BuzzFeed is analyzing social sharing and how that will influence the company, Nguyen takes me to meet Andrew and Adam Kelleher, the ginger-haired twins who lead the Pound project. Andrew, the engineer, and Adam, the data scientist, explain that Pound is a way for BuzzFeed to understand how people share content across different social networks. Let's say I find an interesting article on Twitter and then copy the link and post it to Facebook, where one of my friends reshapes it to his network, and then one of those people puts it back on Twitter. Pound connects the dots to show how I'm connected to that friend-of-a-friend who put it back on Twitter, even when that social chain—the "propagation graph"—is several links deep and includes multiple platforms. "Facebook only sees how content flows within its own network," says Adam. "It doesn't see how it is connected with other ones."

This is a unique data set, and the Kellehers, whose parents put colored dots on their eyeglasses to tell them apart as kids, have come up with nine different metrics to quantify it all, including the "propagation rate between nodes." That one's particularly valuable because it measures the amount of time it takes for a piece of content to be shared between two people, and if that happens at an increasing rate, it's a good sign that something is going to go mega-vi.

"If you think of the course of human history," Adam adds, "we've seen continually increasing propagation rates within pairs as we've improved our telecom infrastructure." From telegraph to telephone to email to instant messaging, information has moved faster and in larger quantities, spurring economic and social changes in the process.

Collecting massive amounts of data over time has allowed BuzzFeed to learn, among other things, that while ideas get an early start on Twitter, they go wide and become popular on Facebook (which is what Stopera understood about hoverboards). The team is even beginning to grasp how an idea spreads if it's seeded among certain types of people on a specific social network. "We can make predictions about how a

particular piece of content should spread through this network based on where it begins,” says Duncan J. Watts, a sociologist with Microsoft Research and early BuzzFeed adviser who helped devise Pound. That’s why you might see an article titled “Guys Confess Secret Reasons Why They Cry” on a page devoted to stories about cats.

POUND’S INSIGHTS HELP BuzzFeed gain a deeper understanding of its audience. But Pound is just one piece of an even more audacious data initiative called Hive that promises to make its editorial content more shareable than ever.

No one—not Peretti, Nguyen, or anyone else—actually has an exact idea how many pieces of content BuzzFeed creates or where it all gets published. Today, internal teams monitor their output using Google Spreadsheets and Slack—a hack that fails to match BuzzFeed’s increasingly complicated distribution system.

One goal of Hive is to track every editorial idea, even ones that aren’t published, across all of BuzzFeed’s many platforms. A seven-step web recipe for slow-cooker chicken becomes a 46-second Facebook video, and then a 15-second Instagram clip with the instructions written as a comment, and finally a Pinterest post with two images and a link back to the Facebook video. And if it’s going on Snapchat, it needs to be shot in portrait mode as well. It’s all the exact same recipe, but “we put it on Facebook, and we put it on YouTube, and we put it on AOL and Yahoo,” says Hive lead Jane Kelly, “and all of a sudden it’s 15 different MP4 files.” Soon, every piece of content produced will be uploaded into a central database and assigned a unique ID.

Hive will enable BuzzFeed engineers to create many other useful tools, including being able to track how well something like that slow-cooker recipe performs as it migrates from Twitter to Facebook to Snapchat. What’s more, it knows how each piece of content is related—whether it was about the same topic or featured a particular actor—and how well it connected with an audience. If a writer is going to do a post about pizza, Peretti says, “you should see all the things that the audiences have loved about pizza, you should see what people have done before,” he explains, “then build on top of that.”

Take, for example, the series about short-girl problems: It began with an article on the website that attracted more than 8 million views, titled “30 Awkward Moments Every Short Girl Understands”; it then became a scripted YouTube video (“10 Problems Only Short Girls Understand”); and ultimately it inspired a cartoon titled *Trans Girl Problems* that appeared on Facebook. Hive will speed the editorial evolution of popular ideas like this one.

From a technical perspective, Hive is both simple—maybe five tables in a relational database—and absurdly abstract. One diagram Kelly shows me has a pipe labeled PIXIE DUST as well as an animated Super Mario jumping up and down on part of it.

“We think of it as like a Voltron,” says Nguyen, referencing the schlocky 1980s cartoon starring a super robot. Each platform is a smaller robot, and the combined learning about what works across all of them make BuzzFeed “like an even more powerful robot that no one can defeat.”

Voltron, er, Hive will be increasingly important as BuzzFeed expands globally, to identify what works across borders. Like its approach to different social networks, BuzzFeed aims to create something organic in each global market rather than simply translating an article into another language. “We don’t want to be seen as an American company that’s going into these local markets spreading the gospel of American pop Internet culture,” says Qichen Zhang, an international product lead. Better that BuzzFeed find content in far-flung locales that appeals to everyone across the globe. Peretti, channeling Marshall McLuhan, believes BuzzFeed will succeed globally because of the rise of postliterate media. “*Angry Birds*, *Candy Crush*, *Minions*, *Transformers*,” he rattles off. “Anywhere the dialogue is less important than the special effects. Or a Nicki Minaj video. There are things that you don’t really need language to appreciate.”

The platonic ideal can be seen in one of BuzzFeed’s biggest 2015 hits, sparked when Stopera noticed that his iPhoto feed started including pictures of a man in China standing next to an orange tree. He figured out that the photos were coming from his old iPhone, which he had lost in a bar a year earlier, so he wrote a story about it. A few hours after it was published, the story was translated into Chinese and posted to Weibo, a Twitter-like service in China which at the time had 198 million monthly active users. Stopera soon became that network’s most popular trending topic. Weibo users tracked down the guy in the photo with the orange tree, Li Hongjun, and brokered an introduction to Stopera, who bought a plane ticket to China and, a few weeks later, landed in the Meizhou prefecture where he was met at the airport by a mob of reporters. Stopera and Brother Orange, as he’s now known, traveled around the country for eight days, met by ever-larger crowds and showered with gifts. They held press conferences, planted an orange tree, took a mud bath together, posed for photos with babies, and rode around in a car with their faces painted on its side. At one point, Stopera inadvertently endorsed a few liquor products. The BuzzFeed post on Weibo about their first meeting racked up 70 million views, and the duo appeared together on the *Ellen DeGeneres Show*. The tale of the lost-iPhone-turned-heartwarming-bromance is soon to become a feature-length documentary, produced by BuzzFeed Motion Pictures.

AMID THE TUMULT of BuzzFeed’s editorial and data operations, it can be easy to forget that the company makes money by achieving viral lift for advertisers. BuzzFeed houses a branded studio that produces lists, quizzes, and (increas-

ingly) customized video for clients such as HBO, Taco Bell, and Ford; copywriters have access to the same data insights as everyone else at the company. BuzzFeed places native ads—which are designed to look like the content where they appear—not only on its own site but everywhere it distributes its editorial. What’s more, many brands value BuzzFeed’s social wizardry so much that they hire the company simply to distribute their traditional ads to a targeted audience, primarily on Facebook. (This helps explain why BuzzFeed appears to spend so much money there.)

The business model is inspired in part by Google, which “built a search engine where you put in a keyword and you get relevant results, and you also get relevant sponsor results,” Peretti explains. “It’s the same engine that’s powering recommendations to queries. When they get better at doing that core thing for consumers, they also make more money.”

Selling ads at BuzzFeed falls primarily to Greg Coleman, a former HuffPo colleague of Peretti’s who joined as president in the summer of 2014, and CMO Frank Cooper, who came over from PepsiCo a year later. Their task is to make BuzzFeed a core part of marketers’ advertising budget, despite its unorthodox approach. “I can’t do, ‘Oh, look at my cool BuzzFeed way,’” Coleman says. “I have to hold BuzzFeed to the same standards in terms of efficacy, research, and proof points, use down-and-dirty syndicated research, things that they know.”

The custom ads that Coleman’s team are selling are still considered out there by many marketers. Coleman recounts one brand exec audibly gasping when shown a two-minute comic vignette that didn’t feel like a TV spot. The video in question, though, has become BuzzFeed’s advertising calling card: The “Dear Kitten” campaign for Purina’s Friskies brand cat food, where a feline elder statesman (which happens to be voiced by Ze Frank) schools a kitty in the ways of the world—“I remember when I could fit in a shoe. There’s nothing like it, being engulfed by 360 degrees of foot smell. [Sniff] Enjoy it while you can.” Hilarious, cuddly, and including an obvious pitch for cat food, the original spot has been watched almost 25 million times on YouTube alone, and nine subsequent videos have racked up another 40 million YouTube views. (“Dear Kitten” has been so successful that many clients expect a monster hit just like it. Coleman says he’s had to guide brands to understand just what BuzzFeed can and cannot do for them: “We never go to a credit-card company and say, ‘Oh, we’re going to sell a billion credit cards.’”)

As Cooper points out, it’s not just the tone of the content that BuzzFeed is challenging, but also the way ad programs are developed. Rather than contract with a client to produce a set number of videos and hope they hit the mark—which is how traditional ad agencies work with clients—BuzzFeed wants to sell companies on the idea of rapidly iterating through a series of videos around

a key message in an attempt to find the best fit for a particular platform. It's not all that different from how BuzzFeed editors cycle through posts on a topic like hoverboards until they hit the zeitgeist. There were four other Purina videos that hardly anyone saw before "Dear Kitten."

"It sounds like a revolution," says Cooper, 51. "Large corporations don't like revolutions. They like predictability. They like incremental growth." Still, BuzzFeed's way is catching on. In August, BuzzFeed and GroupM, a division of WPP, one of the world's largest advertising conglomerates, struck a yearlong, multimillion-dollar deal to create and distribute content together, following this model. "Their ability to conceive, create, test, define, and then either abandon or rinse and repeat is phenomenal," says Rob Norman, GroupM's chief digital officer. The alliance has already led to video production for 13 different clients, including Nike, Target, and Unilever, with another 45 in the pipeline. "We're spending more money with them than either of us expected," Norman says.

POUND AND HIVE. chaos and comedy, serendipity and quantified metrics: These are the tools of BuzzFeed's newfangled global media enterprise. "There's an opportunity for a modern media company to be more engaged with the audience than ever before," Peretti says, "and have a more intimate connection in people's lives, to respond and be reactive to the things that matter to people."

In late November, he invites me to sit in on a guest lecture at an NYU Stern School of Business class on digital media innovation. In front of a packed auditorium of aspiring MBAs, Peretti, clad casually in his favorite gray hoodie, poses a series of questions about how BuzzFeed measures the impact of its work. *Does the asset work across platforms? Does it click internationally? Does it help people connect with one another? Does it improve their lives? Does it inform the public and change institutions? Does it make the world more open and diverse?*

BuzzFeed has answered them all, whether it's an article titled "29 Things Everyone With Nipples Should Know" that led one reader to visit the doctor and discover she had stage 1 breast cancer or the weekly podcast *Another Round*, which recently featured Hillary Clinton as a guest. The cohosts, Heben Nigatu and Tracy Clayton, asked: Did the mass incarceration policies passed during her husband's administration "really fuck [things] up for black people" in the United States? The answer didn't go mega-vi, but never has Clinton seemed more human.

Peretti is commanding and charming as he leads these 400 students through BuzzFeed 201. He's a damn good teacher. "The intellectual challenge of trying to understand why ideas spread, how they spread, human psychology, those kinds of things," Peretti says, "is infinitely rich. I don't feel like you ever figure that out." The more BuzzFeed remains focused on understanding people, the better a business it'll be. **FC**

Sama

(Continued from page 89)

get jobs on Thumbtack after that, it would make everyone very happy. Are there any gaps [our students] could fill?"

Swanson pulls up a spreadsheet. Carpet cleaning? Lawn mowing? Moving? He moves down the list of job requests for which Thumbtack has the most unmet demand. Before long, Janah and Swanson launch into a full-fledged brainstorming session, and I watch like it's a game of Ping-Pong. Swanson has an idea for outsourcing video editing in partnership with GoPro: "One click, and someone in Africa would pick out the good clips and set it to a song." Janah suggests a matchmaking service, with workers swiping profiles on their clients' behalf. She pitches Swanson on joining a yet-to-be-created Sama advisory board and a plot in which cities would use Thumbtack to hire Samaschool graduates. Swanson is careful not to commit, but he can't stop nodding his head at the ideas. As Janah says on her way out, "We have so many businesses to start."

THE IDEA FOR THE LAXMI skin-care line first occurred to Janah during a trip to Benin, West Africa, where she realized that locals were growing shea in their yards. "I said, 'Let's build an export industry, but only buy from poor women,'" she remembers. "We can solve poverty while also making our skin better." Laxmi's mission, as with Sama's not-for-profit initiatives, is to create good jobs.

When I visit last fall, Laxmi has just shipped its first orders, and Janah has set up a notification on her phone to alert her every time a new customer orders Nilotica Facial Crème (\$72 for 50 ml) or Rose Water Regenerating Mist (\$52 for 50 ml) from the website. "Did you see that we made a sale this morning?" she asks MJ Doctors, Laxmi's COO, as she enters a meeting in a Sama conference room. Doctors, who is just as excited as Janah about the early sale, has spent the past year traveling to rural African villages to set up Laxmi's ethical supply chain, sourcing its antiaging ingredient, called Kigelia, from South Africa and its rose water from Morocco.

The \$11.2 billion luxury cosmetics market is a crowded one, so having a product line with a good story attached to it is essential, and this meeting is devoted to Laxmi's marketing. Thea Kocher, Laxmi's chief marketing officer, who has also led marketing at beauty brands Caudalie and Bobbi Brown, Skypes into the meeting from New York. Janah swivels her laptop so that the screen faces Doctors and the beamed-in Kocher. She plays a video produced by the natural candy company Unreal. "We love candy," it begins. "But it's made with junk." Janah pauses the video. "I think a key marketing idea," she says, "is that

you should be able to pronounce all of the ingredients in your food, but why not what you put on your skin? Do you really want Yellow No. 5 on your face?"

Janah tells me later that she wants Laxmi to be like Method Products, the household supplies company. Does Method use bottles made from 100% recycled plastic? Sure. But it distinguishes its soap with its good branding as well as its values. Laxmi has the social-good story and the clean-ingredients list for those people who care about it, but it also has a distinctive design ethos: Its facial cream comes in an appealing black glass jar that blocks UV rays so it doesn't need to use synthetic preservatives.

Initially, Janah envisioned Laxmi as part of her not-for-profit, but she knew Sama's donors would be hesitant to fund the marketing and infrastructure needed to build a high-end beauty brand. "Who cares?" she says of the expenses when compared with the potential benefits. "What you spend on pencils versus pens, versus salaries shouldn't matter. What matters is this amount of money was spent in this fiscal year and this impact was delivered in this fiscal year."

Instead of applying for grants, Janah tapped her network to fund Laxmi's launch, raising a \$2 million seed round from the likes of LinkedIn cofounder Reid Hoffman, Toms Shoes founder Blake Mycoskie, and former Yahoo CEO Tim Koogle (who's also chairman of Method Products). "I was shocked at how easy it was to raise money as a for-profit business," Janah says.

Eventually, Laxmi wants to grow its line to as many as 70 or 80 products. Then, there are ancillary markets such as jewelry and home decorations that Janah envisions expanding into, both of which could create jobs for poor women in remote locations. "This is the beginning," Doctors says. "The idea is to iterate."

The high-end beauty market may seem dissonant with the rest of Sama's mission, but that disparity is by design. "The problem is poor people are typically doing low-margin activities," Janah says. "That's why businesses don't hire them. It's expensive to recruit and train them. However, if you have a big enough margin on top, you can cover the cost and return to investors." Making Laxmi as luxurious as possible is, ironically, the only way for it to effectively employ some of the poorest people in the world.

Sama owns 12% of Laxmi and Janah owns 24%. This means that if Laxmi pays dividends or is acquired, Sama will receive a windfall. "Laxmi can eventually generate money for additional social enterprises," she says.

It is, Janah acknowledges, a hack of the system. In her ideal world, she would not have to promise investors or corporate backers profits, just as she doesn't want to adhere to rigid grant requirements. All of it detracts from maximizing social impact.

But this is not an ideal world, and as Janah told me when we first met, "I don't have a Mother Teresa complex. I'm a pragmatist." **FC**



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Taco Bell

(Continued from page 49)

iteration until finally, in 2014, it appeared as a three-month pilot menu item in outlets around Toledo, Ohio, complete with a local ad campaign to hype it. Despite a blizzard that threatened to spoil the test, drive-through lines wrapped around the restaurants.

Now the Quesalupa is going nationwide, with maximum fanfare: a Super Bowl ad. For the moment, it's being considered a temporary menu item, in large part because Tyson, which is making the shells, still hasn't found a way to automate the process. It turns out that getting cheese inside that shell is fiendishly difficult, and workers are making each one by hand. "It looks like that Lucille Ball skit," Niccol jokes. "I flew to Arkansas to meet with Tyson because I wanted them to know, 'Look, it's hugely important that we figure this out. I need you guys to feel committed to getting to scale.'"

Back at Taco Bell's offices, I get a taste of why Niccol is so eager to ramp up his latest creation. After the Creationeers event ends, a tray of Quesalupas is placed in front of me, and I immediately tear one in half to investigate the much-discussed stuffed casing. As the cheese creates gooey strands between my hands, I nod with recognition. Major cheese pull. The thing is off-the-charts cheesy, beefy, crunchy, and, if you're into that kind of thing, extremely craveable. "The Quesalupa is a fastball," Niccol says. "It's like everything that you love about Taco Bell—amplified."

A 10-MINUTE DRIVE from One Glen Bell Way is a place Taco Bell's tech team calls the Sandbox, one of two nearby restaurants that they use to test new ideas. The Sandbox looks like any other Taco Bell—it's across a parking lot from a Walmart—except for one major difference. At the counter where you would usually place your order with a name tag-sporting employee, you'll instead find a neat row of touch screen-equipped kiosks. There's just one customer-facing worker, who simultaneously handles drive-through customers and answers any questions about the unusual electronic system that lets customers punch in their own orders.

The restaurants, designed in partnership with Ideo and Mobiquity, aren't just cool and interactive; they're meant to encourage users to customize their orders in near-limitless combinations. It's a similar experience to what's now available through Taco Bell's app and website, both of which are heavily oriented toward personalization. "If [a group] is going to make a late-night run," says Niccol, "it's a lot easier to put your order in and have one of you go pick it up, versus you having to remember that, hey, Rob doesn't want onions."

The Sandbox's ordering system is part of an ongoing experiment that could lead to a rethinking of Taco Bell's whole dine-in experience. "This store is always in beta," says Lawrence Kim, the company's director of on-demand. "Tomorrow we're actually installing three more kiosks, because one of the insights we've gotten is it's taking longer for people to order. People are customizing more and experimenting more, so there's going to be a longer line, eventually."

Taco Bell is also keen to explore delivery, which will become more important as it rolls out new outlets in the kinds of city locations that it previously de-emphasized in favor of suburban and rural settings. So far, testing has involved partnering with startups such as DoorDash, to handle the actual taco transport. "[The ordering process] needs to be as simple as Amazon Prime," Niccol says. And the company is experimenting in smaller ways, too, such as possibly building a Slack integration that will let office workers order Gorditas while barely breaking from their workday.

Niccol insists anything is possible. "Drone delivery! Or mood ordering, or weather ordering," he says, referring to AI-enhanced apps that could predict what you want before you're aware of it. "I don't know how many of those things will be novelties versus every day, but for this gen Z group, it's important for them to know that we're the type of brand that could do it if we wanted to." Or as the Insights Lab's Friebe says, "It used to just be about how cool the food is. Now it's almost like how you *get* the food needs to be as cool as the food itself."

And then there's Taco Bell's marketing initiatives. Taco Bell's social media team is given broad autonomy in how they represent the brand online. They work out of a high-tech room called the Fishbowl that's lined with wall-size mission control-ish screens providing real-time info about the always churning online conversation about the company. During my visit, much of the buzz is about the recent addition of a taco to the official emoji set, something Taco Bell pushed fans to lobby for. To celebrate this accomplishment, the company has created a bot that spits out one of 600 GIFs in response to tweets combining the taco icon with any other emoji. This week people are also tweeting about the "Numero Uno" campaign, which involved uprooting Glen Bell's original restaurant—recently slated for destruction—and trucking it to One Glen Bell Way, while live-tweeting the entire journey. The company seems to get Internet culture better than many legacy businesses, which is how Taco Bell landed on *AdWeek's* list of the 24 hottest digital brands of 2015, alongside Vice, Snapchat, and Spotify. "We're this incredibly social, cultlike brand," says Thalberg. "We're just trying to blow wind in those sails."

EVERY MONDAY, NICCOL gathers his executive team for a meeting that takes up a large portion of the day. Lunch is brought up from the Taco Bell outlet

downstairs. In mid-November, in addition to the cage-free announcement and a status update on the Quesalupa rollout, among other topics, Niccol mentions that Wendy's and McDonald's have made some aggressive moves onto Taco Bell's traditional value-menu turf. "It's just going to get more crowded," he warns. Then Niccol proposes something much less tangible, in the form of a koanlike question. "How," he asks, "do we go beyond cheesier and crunchier?"

He doesn't mean it literally, of course. Cheesiness and crunchiness—not to mention beefiness and craveability and everything else that makes people keep coming back to these not-exactly-good-for-you products—are central to Taco Bell. But as Niccol looks ahead, one thing on his mind is how to turn the brand into more of a lifestyle. "I love looking outside the category," he says. "The way H&M is democratizing couture fashion, or Uber is democratizing transportation? I think we have the ability to do the same thing."

What he's aiming for is the kind of connection that Apple or Nike have with their customers. A connection that lets the company set dining trends, like Mexican for breakfast. One where there's enough intrinsic interest that a blockbuster new product, like the Quesalupa, can be launched the same way Paramount would a tentpole movie, with an online teaser campaign building up to the Super Bowl. A connection that makes customers feel like they're buying into a sensibility that's current, youthful, and even a little foodie-ish—not just stopping in for a taco.

Really, Niccol is creating a whole new story around Taco Bell as a place that's not just that default cheap choice for suburbanites, but also one where urban office workers can custom order their lunches, then gather over margaritas after work. "People tell me Taco Bell feels different than it used to," Niccol says. "And to me, that's hugely important. Because if you really look at our menu, excluding the addition of breakfast, it hasn't changed that much. I take that as a sign that I'm changing people's emotional connection to the brand." ☺

ANSWERS TO THE CROSSWORD FROM PAGE 120:

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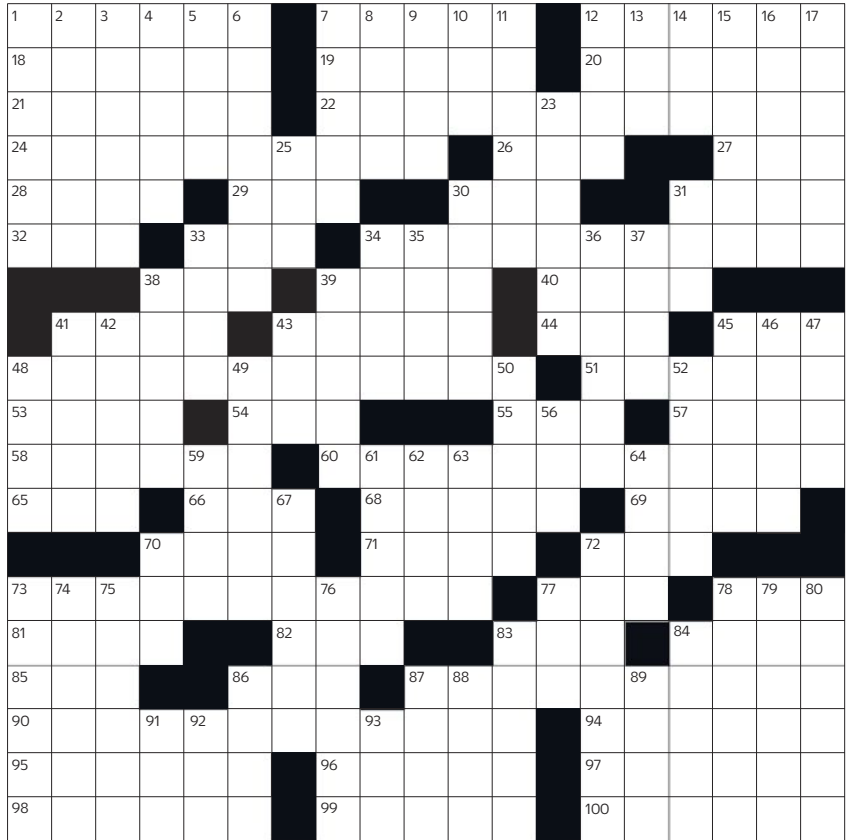
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1. Big name in activity trackers
7. Colorado spectacles
12. Major Black Sea port
18. "Eek!"
19. "___ you a little short for a stormtrooper?"
20. Where the action is
21. Insect's middle
22. Announcing a new product brought to you by Instagram and Spotify!
24. ... Square and TED!
26. Mont Blanc product
27. Lobster ___ Diavolo
28. Whitaker's Oscar-winning role
29. Angry feeling
30. Fish-and-chips fish
31. Capital One offering
32. Miss named?
33. Chess piece that moves in an L shape: Abbr.
34. ... Google and Evite!
38. Dome coverer
39. Expected result
40. "Real Possibilities" org.
41. Amazon's tablet
43. Kind of orange
44. Biggest iPad
45. Trip provider
48. ... UPS and Airbn!
51. Price for a pitch
53. Rumpuses
54. Windows ___
55. Nor. home
57. Like software you're free to manipulate
58. Has to
60. ... Dropbox and Y Combinator!
65. Brand for parents-to-be
66. Article in *Le Monde*
68. Go off script
69. Programmable thermostat
70. Big name in chain saws
71. Cardinals' home, briefly
72. Try to win over
73. ... Netflix and Canon!
77. Faux ___
78. QB Newton
81. Somewhat
82. ___ favor
83. Little bark
84. Tease
85. Grand Central, e.g.: Abbr.
86. Egyptian slitherer
87. ... Pebble and Warby Parker!
90. ... Chipotle and Tinder!
94. They're in it for the long haul
95. Question of self-doubt
96. Bill de Blasio's son
97. Do away with
98. Star of the *Taken* series
99. Watch covertly
100. Facebook post

DOWN

1. Nagasaki A-bomb
2. "Guess who's back!"
3. Canadian \$2 coin
4. Martin Van ___
5. Bloke's exclamation
6. WhatsApp activity
7. Kind of syrup
8. Coach Spoelstra
9. Brief times
10. Myrmecologist's interest
11. Drunken state
12. Bosch product
13. Busting org.
14. Xerox machine's setting: Abbr.
15. Temporarily replace
16. Pointillism artist
17. The same number
23. Baggage handler
25. Drawing class
30. Small film role
31. Once round the track
33. Ukraine's capital
34. Reach new heights
35. Proof word
36. Capital of Zimbabwe
37. Urge on
38. 1-Across's spot
39. Justin Timberlake's boy band
41. Disgusted and then some
42. "You beat me"
43. Underground rock?
45. ___ lazuli
46. Medical insert
47. China's Xiaoping
48. Honored lady
49. Converse rival
50. Sources of news
52. Broncos contest
56. Port on a PC
59. Coach K's team
61. Diplo project Major ___
62. Lysol's target
63. Bone that ends by the elbow
64. Grandson in Genesis
67. Pass by
70. Take a chair
72. Doesn't make a decision
73. Book critic Janet
74. Hard to understand
75. Drummer Colaiuta
76. Low-powered bikes
77. Palm's last smartphone
78. Lunged toward
79. Brief summary
80. Challenges for a maid
83. Biotech company that makes Imlygic and Prolia
84. Port of Tel Aviv
86. Prayer's closing
87. Minuscule
88. Absorbed with
89. Oculus ___
91. Tip jar coins: Abbr.
92. Humana offering
93. Launch, as an app



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